NATION

Heatwave grips Northwest, mercury to hit 45°C in Delhi

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BUSINESS

Markets spurt 1% on buying in HDFC Bank

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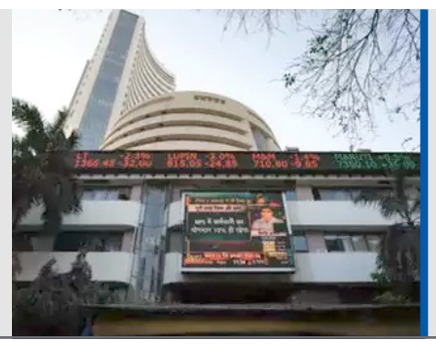

SPORTS

Zverev dominates baseline points, wins the match

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DIGITAL ENGLISH DAILY, BENGALURU

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BENGALURU'S FORECAST

Yesterday
Min temp: 23°C
Max temp: 33°C

Today
Min temp: 23°C
Max temp: 33°C

After Covishield, study says Covaxin has side effects

NEW DELHI, 16 MAY

Nearly one-third of 926 individuals who received Bharat Biotech's anti-Covid vaccine Covaxin reported 'adverse events of special interest,' or AESI, according to a one-year follow up study conducted by a team of researchers at BHU.

Serious AESI, which included stroke and Guillain-Barre syndrome, were reported in 1 per cent of individuals, the study conducted by researchers from Banaras Hindu University (BHU), which looked at long-term safety of the BBV152 (Covaxin) vaccine in adolescents and adults, claimed.

Guillain-Barre syndrome is an autoimmune disorder which causes weakness in nerves in arms and legs.

The study, conducted from January 2022 to August 2023, stated that nearly 50 per cent of the sample size complained of infections during the follow-up period, predominated by viral upper respiratory tract infections.

However, Bharat Biotech said, "several studies have been executed on the safety of Covaxin, and published in peer-reviewed journals, demonstrating an excellent safety track record". The study involved 635 adolescents and 291 adults, who received the BBV152 vaccine.

Published in the journal Springer Nature recently, the study comes against the backdrop of UK pharmaceutical giant AstraZeneca admitting its Covid vaccine can cause rare side-effects of blood clotting and lowering of platelet count in a UK court.

New-onset skin and subcutaneous disorders (10.5 per cent), general disorders (10.2 per cent), and nervous system disorders (4.7 per cent) were the common AESIs in adolescents.

General disorders (8.9), musculoskeletal disorders (5.8 per cent), and nervous system disorders (5.5 per cent) were the common AESIs in adults.

Menstrual abnormalities were noticed in 4.6 per cent of female participants.

Ocular abnormalities and hypothyroidism were observed in 2.7 per cent and 0.6 per cent of participants. Four deaths (three female individuals, one male individual) were reported in adults, the study added. —*PTI*

ED can't arrest after court takes note: SC

SC says ED is powerless over special court

NEW DELHI, 16 MAY

Supreme Court on Thursday held that Enforcement Directorate (ED) cannot arrest an accused under Section 19 of the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA) after a special court has taken cognisance of the complaint of money laundering.

A bench of Justices Abhay S Oka and Ujjal Bhuyan said when an accused appears before a court in pursuance of a summons, the agency will have to apply to the court concerned to get his custody.

"After cognizance is taken of the offence punishable under Section 4 of the PMLA based on a complaint under Section 44, ED and its officers are powerless to exercise powers under Section 19 to arrest a person shown as accused in the complaint," the bench said.

The twin conditions state that when an accused in a money laundering case applies for bail, the court has to first allow the public prosecutor to be heard and only when it is satisfied that the accused is not guilty and unlikely to commit a similar offence when released, can bail be granted.

The apex court judgment was pronounced on a question of whether an accused in a money laundering case has to meet the stringent twin test for bail even in cases where the special court takes cognisance of the offence. "After hearing the accused, the Special Court must pass an order on the application after recording brief reasons. While hearing the application, the court may permit custody only if it is satisfied that custodial interrogation is required even though the accused was never arrested under Section 19," the bench added. Supreme Court said if ED wants to conduct further investigation, "it may arrest a person not shown as an accused in the complaint already filed, provided the requirements of Section 19 are fulfilled," the report mentioned. —*PTI*

SC said when an accused appears before a court, the agency will have to apply to the court concerned to get his custody *PHOTO: PTI*

4 PHASES OF LS POLLS SAW 67% TURNOUT: EC

NEW DELHI, 16 MAY

The cumulative turnout in the first four phases of the Lok Sabha elections has been recorded at 66.95 per cent, the Election Commission (EC) said on Thursday, adding 45.10 crore of the nearly 97 crore electors have voted so far in the ongoing electoral exercise.

In a statement, the poll panel urged electorate to come out and vote in large numbers in the coming phases.

According to the poll authority, the updated voter turnout in the fourth phase of polling held on 13 May was 69.16 per cent, 3.65 percentage points higher than the corresponding phase in the 2019 parliamentary polls.

The updated voter turnout figures for the third phase of polling in the Lok Sabha election stood at 65.68 per cent. In the third phase of the 2019 general election, the turnout was 68.4 per cent.

In the second phase of the election held on 26 April, the turnout was recorded at 66.71 per cent as against the 69.64 per cent in the second phase of the 2019 polls. —*PTI*

'FREEDOM OF RELIGION MUST'

UP conversion law violates rights: SC

NEW DELHI, 16 MAY

Supreme Court on Thursday stayed criminal proceedings before a trial court in Uttar Pradesh over five FIRs alleging illegal conversion of Hindus to Christianity. The apex court also orally commented that the Uttar Pradesh anti-conversion law (UP Prohibition of Unlawful Conversion of Religion Act, 2021) in some parts may seem to be violative of the fundamental right to religion guaranteed under Article 25 of the Constitution.

The FIRs were lodged against the Vice-Chancellor (VC) of the Sam Higginbottom University of Agriculture, Technology and Sciences (SHUATS) Rajendra Bihari Lal.

The top court, which has been granting protection from arrest and bail to the accused, did not allow the prayer of the Uttar Pradesh government for the trial court proceedings to continue. "There should not be further proceedings in connection with the FIRs in the trial court in the case," a bench comprising Justices JB Pardiwala and Manoj Misra said in its order.

The bench took note of the submission of a battery of lawyers including senior advocate Siddharth Dave, appearing for Lal, that the proceedings in the trial court be stayed as all the accused will have to appear following summons that will be issued to them in pursuance of fresh charge sheets filed by the state police in these cases.

Senior lawyer Mukta Gupta, appearing for one of the accused, said testimony of none of the alleged victims, who were claimed to have been lured into Christianity. The bench will resume the hearing on 2 August. Earlier, the bench had fixed for final hearing the nine petitions seeking the quashing or clubbing of five FIRs lodged against the SHUATS VC and others pertaining to alleged illegal religious conversions. Police have also alleged that about 90 Hindus congregated at the Evangelical Church of India in Hariharganj, were lured through fraud and the promise of easy money". —*PTI*

4 children drown in Hassan lake

HASSAN, 16 MAY

Four children died from drowning when they went to swim in a lake at Mutthige village at Aalur taluk in Hassan district on Thursday, police said. The four children, who had a holiday from school, had gone to swim in the lake when the tragedy occurred. The deceased are Sathvik, 13, Jeevan, 13, Vishwa, 12, and Pruthvi, 12. —*Salar News*

Man, who put up Mumbai hoarding that killed 16, held

MUMBAI, 16 MAY

Mumbai police on Thursday arrested Bhavesh Bhinde, whose company put up the giant billboard whose collapse claimed 16 lives, from Udaipur, an official said. The crime branch team of Mumbai police arrested Bhinde, the director of Ego Media Pvt Ltd, the advertising agency responsible for erecting the hoarding in Ghatkopar area of Mumbai. —*PTI*

Prasanna is Karnataka Exam Authority Director

BENGALURU, 16 MAY

State government has appointed Prasanna H, IAS, as Executive Director of Karnataka Examination Authority (KEA), replacing Ramya S, IAS, on Thursday.

This comes after allegations surfaced on 12 May that KEA had included 50 questions in Karnataka Common Entrance Test that were out of the syllabus. Candidates had then filed a complaint at Malleswaram police station against KEA, which was headed by Ramya. In February 2024, High Court penalised the authority for two separate incidents. KEA was fined Rs 1 lakh and Rs 5 lakh, in two instances, for allocating medical seats to ineligible candidates.

Before his current appointment, Prasanna served as Director of Department of Technical Education in 2023, where he played a crucial role in shaping policies and initiatives related to technical education in the State. Before that, he served as Zilla Panchayat CEO in Udupi in 2022, overseeing the administration and development activities at the district level.

Prasanna H *PHOTO: SALAR*

In 2021, Prasanna served as Deputy Resident Commissioner at Karnataka Bhavan, New Delhi, where he represented State government and facilitated coordination between State departments and Central agencies.

He also worked as an Assistant Commissioner at Vijayapura. —*Salar News*

Maliwal files formal plaint over 'assault'

NEW DELHI, 16 MAY

AAP MP and former Delhi Commission for Women (DCW) Chief Swati Maliwal on Thursday submitted a formal complaint to the Delhi Police in the alleged assault on her by Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal's aide Bibhav Kumar.

Delhi Police also recorded her statement. Her statement was recorded by a two-member team of the Delhi Police at her residence in Central Delhi.

According to a police officer,

Swati Maliwal *PHOTO: PTI*

Maliwal told police about the incident that happened at the chief minister's residence on Monday. The officer said with Maliwal's statement recorded, police might register an FIR in connection with the matter.

The police team, led by by Additional Commissioner of Police P S Kushwaha, was at Maliwal's residence for more than four hours.

On Monday, Maliwal went to the Civil Lines police station here and alleged that a member of Kejriwal's personal staff "assaulted" her at the chief minister's official residence, police officials said. —*PTI*

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Antibiotics among 41 medicines to get cheaper soon

NEW DELHI, 16 MAY

The government has reduced the prices of 41 commonly used medicines and six formulations used to treat diseases such as diabetes, heart and liver ailments.

Antacids, multivitamins and antibiotics are among the medicines that will become cheaper, according to a notification issued by the Department of Pharmaceuticals and National Pharmaceutical Pricing Authority (NPPA).

The pharma companies have been instructed to pass on the information on the reduced price of various medicines to dealers and stockists with immediate effect.

The decision was taken at the 143rd meeting of the NPPA in order to ensure that the cost of essential medicines remains affordable for the public. —*PTI*

Hospital leaves 3ft cloth in woman's body

KOLAR, 16 MAY

A woman, who recently delivered a child at Government SNR Hospital in Kolar, complained of stomach and it was later found out that a 3 feet cloth was left inside her body near the vagina.

The husband of the woman alleged negligence and filed a case against the District Surgeon Dr SN Vijayakumar and staff nurse who attended the woman during delivery.

Chandrika of Ramasagara village in Malur gave birth to a baby boy through a normal delivery on 5 May. During the procedure, the medical staff reportedly placed a vaginal mop to check bleeding and later forgot to remove the same while doing the sutures.

A few days later, she suffered from severe stomach and visited a private nursing home in Kolar. The doctors gave her an ointment. A kin of the patient spotted the piece of cloth at the spot where the stitching was done while helping her apply the ointment. —*Salar News*

SUNIL CHHETRI

The GOAT who bettered Indian football retires

He is the 3rd-highest international goals scorer with 94 goals after Cristiano Ronaldo and Lionel Messi

NEW DELHI, 16 MAY

The iconic Sunil Chhetri on Thursday announced his decision to retire from international football after the FIFA World Cup qualifying match against Kuwait on 6 June, bringing the curtains down on a career that is unparalleled in Indian football for its longevity and consistency.

The long-serving national team captain announced his decision via a video he posted on his social media accounts. Chhetri, who made his debut in 2005, has scored 94 goals for the country. He will leave the scene as India's all-time top scorer and most-capped player.

Chhetri, 39, will walk into international sunset after rendering yeoman service for nearly two decades, 19 years to be precise, to a team that was heavily reliant on the 5'7" forward to deliver the goods every time he wore the blue jersey.

"The match Against Kuwait is the last," Chhetri said while announcing his decision. Chhetri's final match will be played at the Salt Lake Stadium in Kolkata, and it is appropriate that he will end his journey in a city, where he has played a lot of his football while evolving into a potent striker. India are currently second in Group A with four points, behind leaders Qatar. Chhetri had made his 150th national appearance in March and scored on the occasion against Afghanistan in Guwahati. On his international debut against Pakistan way back in 2005, Chhetri, who would go on to become one of the game's most lethal strikers, scored, and he rated it as his best moment. Speaking on the future of Indian football, Chettri said that it was time for the country to find the next 9. He felt the team is currently handicapped as none of the current lot of players play as the main striker for their respective clubs. His family members reacted differently to his big decision. "I told my mom, my dad and my wife, my family first, my dad was...he was normal, he was relieved and happy, but mom and wife started crying," he said. —*PTI*

>>>More on Page 8

> I took my jersey, I sprayed some perfume on it, I have no idea why. So that day, everything that happened, once Sukhvinder Singh told me, from breakfast to lunch and to the game and to my first goal in my debut, to conceding late in the 80th minute, that day is probably that I will never forget and is one of the best days of my national team journey
> —Sunil Chhetri, Indian footballer

MAN STABS 3 IN TRAIN NEAR BELAGAVI

BENGALURU, 16 MAY

A railway housekeeping staff member was stabbed by an unidentified passenger on Puducherry- Dadar Express' sleeper coach on Thursday.

According to the press release by South Western Railways, the deceased Devarshi Verma was stabbed in the chest around 5pm between Gunji-Khanapur section of the route. The assailant is not arrested yet, and the motive behind the attack remains unclear. Another railway staff member Ashraf Kittur, who was working as the Train Ticket Examiner on duty, and a passenger were also injured.

On the arrival of the train at Belagavi railway station, first aid was provided to the injured people. —*Salar News*

4 held for drug peddling in Mangaluru

MANGALURU, 16 MAY

Four people were arrested by Central Crime Branch sleuths near Deralakatte and MDMA drugs valued at Rs 6.5 lakh and other items were seized, police said on Thursday. The gang was on its way from Bengaluru to Mangaluru on Wednesday to sell drugs to students, they said. According to Mangaluru city police commissioner Anupam Aggarwal, the operation was conducted under the leadership of CCB ACP Geetha Kulkarni along with CCB ream Shyam Sunder Sharanappa and others. *—PTI*

Contractor arrested for sexually harassing staff

KOLAR, 16 MAY

Bethamangala police on Thursday arrested a contractor for allegedly sexually harassing a woman colleague in Ramasagagara Village Panchayat office. The accused Arjun Harikrisha, a bill collector, allegedly also took obscene photos of the victim, who was a contract basis worker. These pictures reportedly went viral on social media during the last few days and the woman filed complaint with Bethamangala police. She alleged that he has been sexually harassing her while doing work at the office. *—Salar News*

Power, water crisis: HD Kote hospital sends back patients

MYSURU, 16 MAY

HD Kote Taluk Government Hospital in Mysuru district has sent back at least 5 to 10 dialysis patients on Tuesday and Wednesday due to the erratic supply of electricity and water. This has worsened precarious healthcare in an area dominated by tribal communities. A video depicting the hospital's struggle without access to basic amenities has gone viral on social media. After being discharged, people with respiratory issues are compelled to seek alternative avenues for care due to the hospital's inability to provide essential services. Hospital staff are stretched thin as they strive to deliver care amidst adverse conditions. District Health Officer Dr Kumaraswamy has assured swift intervention to address the pressing challenges confronting the hospital. *—Salar News*

PHOTO: PTI

SWR records surge in summer train travel

BENGALURU, 16 MAY

South Western Railway (SWR) recorded a significant rise in passenger traffic and revenue during the operation of summer special trains in April. The footfall of passengers surged by 59.92 per cent compared to the corresponding period last year and revenue increased by Rs 22.89 crore in April, a statement said. The number of summer special trains increased by 89.28 per cent compared to the previous year, with 53 trains running a total of 338 trips. These summer special trains connected major cities and tourist destinations across Andhra Pradesh, Odisha, Jharkhand, West Bengal, Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Assam, Gujarat, Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, Rajasthan, Telangana, and Assam. KSR Bengaluru-Danapur route was the best performing route, generating a revenue of Rs 88.86 lakh. SWR's General Manager, Arvind Srivastava said these special trains have also benefited migrant workers as well. *—Salar News*

BJP attacks Cong govt over Hubballi murder

Bommai said govt using police to suppress political opponents

BENGALURU, 16 MAY

Anjali Ambiger PHOTO: PTI

Opposition BJP on Thursday came down heavily on Congress government in Karnataka over the murder of a young woman in Hubballi, accusing it of having failed to maintain law and order, and losing its grip on the administration.

Former chief ministers Basavaraj Bommai and Jagadish Shettar, and former deputy chief minister CN Ashwath Narayan took a dig at the Siddaramaiah-led administration following the murder of 20-year-old Anjali Ambiger in Hubballi on Wednesday, close on the heels of the student Neha Hiremath killing at her college campus in the same city on 18 April.

"Among the reasons for the murder, the role of police is also big, police are indirectly responsible for the murder as they have been unable to stop it. Law and order has completely deteriorated across the State," Bommai said in Gadag.

He charged the government with using police to suppress political opponents. "After elections, police are indulging in filing cases against Opposition party workers like atrocity cases."

In Hubballi, Shettar said Congress government has no grip on the administration. "After the Neha Hiremath murder case, we felt that police would be alert or there would be directions from the top including Chief Minister and Home Minister to take stringent measures to maintain law and order, but the State government seems to have taken the things easily, so one after the other murders are happening," he said.

Referring to Anjali's murder case, Shettar said that given the increase in the number of such incidents across the State, it is obvious that the government has failed to maintain law and order, and Chief Minister Siddaramaiah, Home Minister G Parameshwara and Deputy Chief Minister DK Shivakumar should take responsibility.

Narayan said in Bengaluru that the government is about to complete one year in office, and this period saw incidents of murders, extortion, and "exuberance of fanatic forces", adding, "appeasement politics" is on the rise and the law and order has completely deteriorated. *—PTI*

Two cops suspended over alleged inaction

HUBBALLI , 16 MAY

A police inspector and a woman head constable have been suspended on charges of dereliction of duty over the murder of a young woman who was stabbed to death by an acquaintance after she reportedly rejected his marriage proposal.

They have been accused of failing to take prompt action on the threats previously held out to the 20-year-old Anjali Ambiger by a 22-year-old youth, identified as Girish Sawanth, who allegedly murdered her at her home at Veerapur Oni here on Wednesday. The move comes based on an internal inquiry conducted by a DCP-rank officer into the matter and based on the report, police said.

Hubballi Dharwad Police Commissioner Renuka Sukumar suspended Bendigeri Police Inspector CB Chikkodi and head constable Rekha Havaraddi from service, on charges of dereliction of duty.

The victim's family alleged that they had approached the police and complained to them that the accused had threatened her of meeting the same fate as that of 23-year-old Neha Hiremath, who was stabbed to death by her former classmate at her college campus in Hubballi on 18 April. They alleged that the police did not take the complaint seriously.

A case of murder under Section 302 of the Indian Penal Code has been registered against the accused, police said, adding that teams have been formed to nab him. *—PTI*

Accused Girish Sawanth PHOTO: SALAR

CLOUDY SKIES EXPECTED

South Karnataka is expected to receive rainfall between 115.5mm to 204.5m rain PHOTO: SALAR

IMD warns of heavy rainfall; orange alert issued till 18 May

BENGALURU, 16 MAY

India Meteorological Department (IMD) has issued an orange alert for South Interior Karnataka including Bengaluru and Mysuru, warning of heavy rainfall expected to hit the state from 18 to 20 May. South Karnataka is expected to receive rainfall between 115.5mm to 204.5mm of rain. Coastal regions will also see rains on 17 May, while Kerala, Mahe, and South Interior Karnataka will join in on the downpour from 18 May onwards.

According to IMD, while the skies will be generally cloudy with rain or thunder-showers on 18 May, the following days of 20 and 21 May will see a transition to partly cloudy skies with a chance of rain or thunderstorms.

Temperatures are expected to remain in a range of 23 degrees Celsius to 33 degrees Celsius.

Meanwhile, several districts in Karnataka were lashed out by the rains on Thursday, bringing much respite from the summer heat. Intense thunderstorms and heavy rains were seen in Chikkamagaluru, Uttara Kannada, Shivamogga, Haveri, Dharwad, Belagavi, and Vijayapura.

Shiggaon in Haveri received the highest rainfall at 71mm, followed by Kundol taluk in Dharwad at 62mm. Bengaluru's eastern parts of the City, which have remained dry so far, are showing signs of rain activity. The IMD reports thunderstorm developments near Kodagu, Napoklu, Yemmemadu, Kunjila and Nelaji, Mulbagal and Hemavathi reservoir. *—Salar News*

Congress will win over 300 seats: DKS

BENGALURU, 16 MAY

DK Shivakumar PHOTO: PTI

Deputy Chief Minister DK Shivakumar said Congress-led INDIA alliance will win more than 300 seats in Lok Sabha elections and form government at Centre. "Congress alliance believes in Constitution like Bhagavad Gita, Bible and Quran and the voters should protect our holy book, Constitution," he said in Lucknow on Thursday.

Shivakumar lashed out at Prime Minister Narendra Modi stating, "Your Mangalsutra will not be safe under Congress rule. During the 10 years of Modi government, the cost of 10 grams of gold has surged from Rs 25,000 to Rs 75,000 posing significant challenges for women in purchasing mangalsutras."

Central government failed to implement its promises of Central Food Security Act to reduce hunger, NREGA to solve unemployment, Right to Education to get education for everyone. "BJP is just doing emotional politics. I am asking the Prime Minister, his party leaders and the Chief Ministers of Uttar Pradesh whether the Centre government has given a single scheme to satisfy the hunger of the common people and to provide relief to their sufferings during the past 10 years," Shivakumar said.

Shivakumar said Congress alliance is committed to addressing key issues such as unemployment and rising prices and highlighted the implementation of guarantee schemes in Karnataka as a testament to their dedication. "Congress came to power in Karnataka and implemented guarantee schemes," he said.

Shivakumar questioned the disparity between the development models of Gujarat and Uttar Pradesh, particularly under the leadership of Prime Minister Modi. He highlighted the absence of similar development initiatives in Uttar Pradesh compared to the progress witnessed during Akhilesh Yadav's tenure. Shivakumar said, "60 lakh candidates have applied for the recruitment of 6,000 police constables in Uttar Pradesh. This is the biggest proof of unemployment in the state. Youths from Uttar Pradesh are migrating to Bengaluru in search of employment." *—Salar News*

'20,000 GIFT BOXES DISTRIBUTED'

BJP files plaint against Cong MLC candidate over freebies

BENGALURU, 16 MAY

BJP workers filed a complaint with Election Commission against Ramoji Gowda, Congress candidate from Bengaluru Graduate constituency in Legislative Council elections, over the distribution of gifts to voters.

The complaint filed on Thursday alleged that around 20,000 gift boxes intended for distribution to voters were found in godowns, purportedly brought by the Congress candidate's camp for the elections scheduled on 3 June. The gift items, packed and ready for distribution, were found in two separate locations in JP Nagar and Anekal. These gift items were similar to a set found in Jayanagar on Tuesday, the complaint said.

Attibele police raided the godown in JP Nagar and recovered the gift kits that had the photographs, greetings and details of Congress candidate Gowda on their cover. The boxes contained various items, including kitchen sets, with the initials 'RG' imprinted on them. Election Commission officials seized the gift boxes found at the second location at a DTDC godown in Thirumagondanahalli, Anekal taluk. These gift boxes were kept ready for distribution to voters via courier.

Taking it to X, BJP Karnataka unit hit out at Congress government saying, "#ATMSarkara who looted Kannadigar's tax and was caught illegally distributing it in elections. Ramoji Gowda, a candidate from the Bangalore Graduate Constituency of Congress, had conspired to send over 20,000 gifts by courier. Congress has reached the pathetic state of luring educated graduates for votes. The Congress candidate should be disqualified immediately." *—Salar News*

Sex scandal: Revanna gets interim bail

BENGALURU, 16 MAY

HD Revanna PHOTO: PTI

A court here on Thursday granted interim bail to JD(S) MLA and former minister HD Revanna in a sexual harassment case.

The case of sexual harassment of a 47-year-old house help was registered against Revanna and his son and MP Prajwal Revanna at the Holenarsipur town police station in Hassan district on 28 April. Prajwal reportedly left for Germany on 27 April and is still at large.

The complainant had claimed that the father-son duo had sexually abused her at the 66-year-old MLA's house. Special Investigation Team which is probing the alleged sexual abuse charges against Prajwal and related cases, had sought custody of the former minister. Revanna's advocates sought anticipatory bail in the case. 42nd Additional Chief Metropolitan Magistrate Court gave interim relief to Revanna till Friday.

A Special Court for Elected Representatives on Monday granted bail to Revanna in a case where he is accused of having kidnapped one of the women allegedly abused sexually by Prajwal, as seen in the leaked videos.

Revanna was then released from jail. *—PTI*

HDD ASKS ALL NOT TO CELEBRATE HIS BIRTHDAY

JD(S) patriarch and former prime minister HD Deve Gowda, whose grandson and Hassan MP Prajwal Revanna is facing investigation under multiple sexual abuse charges, on Thursday said he will not be celebrating his birthday on Saturday. The 91-year-old also appealed to party workers to strive for strengthening the organisation and victory of BJP-JD(S) candidates in the biennial election to six seats of Karnataka Legislative Council on 3 June. "I will be completing 91 years of age and entering 92, but due to some reasons, I'm not celebrating my birthday," Gowda said *—PTI*

City student found dead with throat, wrist slit

BENGALURU, 16 MAY

Mystery shrouded the death of a young woman who was found with her throat and wrist slit on Wednesday.

Prabhudhya, 21, who was studying in second PUC, lived with her mother and brother. She was found dead in the bathroom of her house in Subrahmanyapura on Wednesday with her throat and wrist slit, police said. The incident came to light around 7 pm on Wednesday. The PUC student is said to have died of excess bleeding.

Bengaluru South Division DCP Lokesh B Jagalasar said an investigation is on and would cover all aspects of the incident. *—PTI*

PHOTO: IANS

DETERMINED TO MAKE NANDINI GLOBAL BRAND: CM

BENGALURU, 16 MAY

With Scotland cricket team announcing Karnataka-based Nandini dairy brand as their official sponsor in upcoming T20 World Cup in the US, Chief Minister Siddaramaiah on Thursday said his government is determined to introduce to the world both the best quality milk products of the State. Sharing the news on 'X', he termed it as a 'significant step' in making Nandini a global brand. "Karnataka's proud Nandini company, known in countries like Malaysia, Vietnam, Singapore, USA, Dubai, UAE, is now sponsoring Scotland and Ireland in the T20 World Cup," Siddaramaiah said. *—PTI*

224 DRINKING WATER UNITS SHUT

Water scarcity grips Uttara Kannada

KARWAR, 16 MAY

224 out of the 241 clean drinking water units constructed by Zilla Panchayat shut down PHOTO: PTI

Uttara Kannada district is grappling with a severe water crisis as at least 165 villages nestled in the coastal and mountainous regions reel under the grip of drought. The situation has escalated in 46 villages where wells and borewells have run dry, leaving residents with access to water only once a week.

Adding to the distress, 224 out of the 241 clean drinking water units constructed by Zilla Panchayat shut down due to inadequate maintenance and electricity connection issues. The communities of Mundagoda, Siddapur and Kumta are particularly hit, contending with wells and borewells yielding unclean water.

More than 120 borewells and 80 public wells have gone dry in the hilly areas. Despite efforts to implement alternative water distribution systems across 11 taluks, challenges persist due to the scarcity of available water resources. While emergency borewells have been drilled in some areas, many communities continue to grapple with water scarcity owing to insufficient water availability.

The crisis extends to coastal regions, where wells in Ankola and Karwar are contaminated with saltwater.

In the highlands of Sirsi, public wells have dried up entirely, leaving residents of Kasturaba layout without water for days. Jivajala Task Force, Sirsi, collaborated with the municipal council to supply drinking water to affected areas.

With the water scarcity in Uttara Kannada district reaching critical levels, the absence of rainfall in several parts of the region worsened the crisis. Unless substantial rainfall occurs within the next two days, there looms a looming threat of river sources in the district running dry. *—Salar News*

- Uttara Kannada district is grappling with a severe water crisis as more than 165 villages nestled in the coastal and mountainous regions reel under the grip of drought. The situation has escalated in 46 villages where wells and borewells have run dry

C'nagar drops in SSLC rankings due to staff shortage

C'NAGAR, 16 MAY

PHOTO: PTI

Chamarajanagar, one of the backward districts in the State, has slipped to 24th place from 7th in the rankings for districts in SSLC examinations this year.

The main reasons for the downfall are the shortage of qualified teachers and limited infrastructure in schools, according to stakeholders in the sector.

There is a shortfall of 923 teachers in primary schools, with only 2,076 out of the required 2,999 positions filled. Similarly, high schools face a deficit of 205 teachers out of the 810 needed, with only 605 positions occupied.

Despite efforts by Department of Primary and Secondary Education to address staffing shortages through the deployment of guest teachers, the failure to recruit an adequate number of permanent staff persists. Moreover, the deteriorating condition of school infrastructure, with 257 rooms deemed unusable and 97 requiring urgent repairs, compounds the challenges faced by students and educators alike.

The parents, teachers and other stakeholders are urging the government to make a concerted effort to attract students back to government schools by enhancing facilities and creating a conducive learning environment. *—Salar News*

PHOTO: FB

ED says Rs 32.2 cr cash seized linked to minister Alam

RANCHI, 16 MAY

The Rs 32.2 crore cash seized from the Ranchi-based premise of the domestic help of a Secretary of Jharkhand Minister Alamgir Alam "pertains" to the lawmaker and he enjoyed a fixed commission of 1.5 per cent from every tender executed in his department, the Enforcement Directorate (ED) alleged on Thursday. ED made this claim as it produced the 74-year-old Alam, a Congress leader from Pakur, before the court of special Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA) Prabhat Kumar Sharma. He was arrested on Wednesday by the agency here. The court sent him to six days of ED custody. The ED had raided Alam's personal secretary Sanjeev Kumar Lal and his domestic help Jahangir Alam on 6 May and recovered a total Rs 32.2 crore from a flat in the name of the latter person. The total cash seizure in this case is Rs 37.5 crore. *—PTI*

3 Naxalites held for murder of BJP leader in Ch'garh

BIJAPUR, 16 MAY

Three Naxalites allegedly involved in the murder of a BJP functionary in Chhattisgarh's Bijapur district in March this year were arrested on Thursday, police said. The cadres were arrested from Chintanpalli village under Toynar police station limits of Bijapur when a joint team of the District Reserve Guard (DRG) and the Chhattisgarh Armed Force (CAF) - both units of state police, was out on an area domination operation, an official said. Police identified those arrested as Munna Mudma, 32, — a militia commander — Raju Mudma, 31, — a member of the Dandakaranya Adivasi Kisan Mazdoor Sangthan (DAKMS — a front of Maoists) and Lakhmu Mudma (39) — a militia member. Katla was attacked with sharp-edged weapons when he had gone to attend a wedding in Toynar. *—PTI*

Expelled SAD leader Ravikaran Kahlon joins BJP

CHANDIGARH, 16 MAY

Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD) leader Ravikaran Singh Kahlon on Thursday joined the BJP here on Thursday, a day after he was expelled by the Sukhbir Singh Badal-led party. Kahlon was welcomed into the party fold by Punjab BJP chief Sunil Jakhar and party leader Manjinder Singh Sirsa. Kahlon is the son of former Punjab Assembly speaker and rural development and panchayat minister Nirmal Singh Kahlon. Kahlon had unsuccessfully contested the 2022 Punjab Assembly polls from the Dera Baba Nanak seat. Badal on Wednesday expelled Kahlon from the primary membership of the SAD for "anti-party" activities and "backstabbing" the party. *—PTI*

Fire breaks out in Delhi BJP office; no casualties

NEW DELHI, 16 MAY

On Thursday, a fire broke out in the Bharatiya Janata Party's (BJP) Delhi State Office at Pandit Pant Marg. According to the Media Department of Delhi BJP, there was a minor short circuit in the electricity meter box today around 4.15 pm which caused a tiny fire. Upon receiving the information, the NDMC Electric Staff and a fire brigade team reached the spot. It further informed that the fire was brought under control by 4:30 pm adding that only the electricity of the office complex has gone which may take a few hours to restore. "There is zero damage of property and no one was just," it added. *—ANI*

SP & Cong tried to cause riots: Modi

PM says Cong is spreading lies about CAA

AZAMGARH, 16 MAY

Prime Minister Narendra Modi said on Thursday the country has started granting citizenship under the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) while the Opposition Samajwadi Party (SP) and Congress tried to cause riots in the country by spreading lies about the law.

Addressing a Lok Sabha election rally in the Lalganj area here, he said, "The work of giving refugees citizenship under CAA has already started. These are those people who have been living in the country for a long time as refugees and were victims of partition of the country done on the basis of religion."

Modi also accused Congress of neglecting these refugees. "Congress and SP tried to spread lies in the name of CAA. They tried to push Uttar Pradesh and the entire country towards riots," he alleged. The Prime Minister added that although the people of "INDI alliance" claim they will remove CAA, "no one can do it".

Modi also said that this Lok Sabha election is an opportunity for the country to choose a leader who can run a strong government which "makes the world aware of India's strength".

Modi was addressing an election rally organised at a college ground here in support of BJP candidates Kripashankar Singh from the Jaunpur parliamentary constituency in Uttar Pradesh. "Such a prime minister who runs a strong government which cannot be dominated by the world but which makes the world aware of India's strength. Therefore, when you vote for our Kripashankar ji from Jaunpur, BP Saroj ji from Machhlishahr, your vote forms a strong government. The votes given to them will go directly into Modi's account," the prime minister said.

Amid slogans of 'Jai Shri Ram' and 'Har Har Modi', Modi said, "Your enthusiasm shows that you have made it difficult for the INDIA bloc to win even a single seat in Uttar Pradesh." *—PTI*

Prime Minister Narendra Modi holds a mace during a public meeting in support of BJP candidate Kripashankar Singh in Jaunpur **PHOTO: PTI**

'Cong follows Bapu, not anti-religious'

Religious UP govt ignores cows: Priyanka

RAE BARELI, 16 MAY

Congress leader Priyanka Gandhi Vadra on Thursday said her party follows the ideals of Mahatma Gandhi who uttered "Hey Ram" before dying and Prime Minister Narendra Modi was wrong in accusing it of being anti-religion.

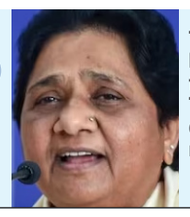
"They accuse us of being against the Hindu religion. We follow Mahatma Gandhi's ideal who had chanted 'Hey Ram' before dying," she said, addressing a poll rally at 'Chaudah Mill roundabout,' about 20 km from the district headquarters.

She alleged that while the saffron party claims to be a "champion of Hindu religion," the condition of the state-run cowsheds in Uttar Pradesh remains pitiable.

"They accuse us of being against religion for turning down invitations for the consecration ceremony in Ayodhya. Just look at the condition of the cowsheds in UP where a video showed dogs eating flesh of a dead cow," she said. She said that during Congress rule in Chhattisgarh, the party improved the condition of cowsheds and used to purchase cow dung to aid self help groups running the cowsheds.Priyanka has been canvassing every day in the Rae Bareli constituency, where Rahul Gandhi has thrown in his hat replacing his mother Sonia Gandhi, who had to vacate the seat after being nominated to the Rajya Sabha from Rajasthan. Priyanka highlighted the strong bond the Gandhi family has with the constituency since the days of Indira Gandhi and Rajiv Gandhi.

"Bhaiya (Rahul Gandhi) will follow the tradition after winning the election," she said. She accused the Modi government of trying to take credit for free ration scheme by putting his photograph on the papers related to the scheme, saying it was the Congress-led UPA government that brought the Right to Food Act.She promised doing away with GST on education and scrap Agni-Veer scheme for recruitment if her party comes to power at the Centre. *—PTI*

Congress General Secretary Priyanka Gandhi greets the gathering during a roadshow for the Lok Sabha Polls, in Rae Bareli on Thursday **PHOTO: ANI**



The free ration to the poor is not a favour by the BJP or the government, it comes from the tax money paid by the people. Therefore, it is inappropriate to make fun of the poor by asking them for votes in return.

-Mayawati, Bahujan Samaj Party Supremo

There is not even one per cent truth in what Modi speaks these days. He has lost confidence. Budget allocation on the basis of caste and religion can never happen. This is foolish.

-Sharad Pawar, NCP (SP) Chief

Never ever has such an incident happened where roads were shut for Prime Minister Narendra Modi's campaign and causing inconvenience to people. It is inhuman to hold a roadshow where people died after the hoarding collapse.

-Sanjay Raut, Shiv Sena (UBT) MP

Kejri mum on Maliwal issue, Akhilesh asks to shift focus

Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal and Punjab CM Bhagwant Mann visit the Golden Temple to pay obeisance, in Amritsar on Thursday **PHOTO: ANI**

LUCKNOW, 16 MAY

AAP Chief Arvind Kejriwal refused comment on the Swati Maliwal 'assault' at a joint press conference on Thursday where Samajwadi Party (SP) Chief Akhilesh Yadav said there are "more important things" to discuss.

AAP leader Sanjay Singh said there should be no politics on the issue.

He then targeted BJP government and raised the issue of a Manipuri woman being paraded naked, the Prajwal Revanna sex scandal and Maliwal being 'beaten' up by police during protests by wrestlers when she was the Delhi Commission for Women (DCW) Chief.

When Kejriwal was asked a question over the alleged assault of AAP Rajya Sabha MP Maliwal, Yadav said, "There are more important things than that".Singh then took the microphone from the SP Chief, and said BJP and Prime Minister Narendra Modi should answer for atrocities against women during the party rule.

"The entire country is sad till date that wife of a Kargil veteran was paraded naked in Manipur and the Prime Minister of India remained silent. Prajwal raped thousands of women and he was allowed to flee from the country," he alleged, "When the female wrestlers were protesting at Jantar Mantar, Swati Maliwal went there as NCW chief, she was dragged and beaten by the police. In Uttar Pradesh, in case of Kuldeep Singh Sengar and Hathras Modi has remained quiet and not said a word," he said. Maliwal had alleged that Kejriwals' assistant Bibhav Kumar "misbehaved" with her at his residence.

Singh, said, "AAP is our family. Modi should answer on the issue of Maliwal, who was dragged and beaten when she went to seek justice for the female wrestlers." *—PTI*

BJP has always been against reservation. They will change the Constitution and end reservation of SC/ST/OBC after coming to power

-Arvind Kejriwal, Delhi Chief Minister

NCW SUMMONS KEJRI'S AIDE IN MALIWAL CASE

NEW DELHI, 16 MAY

The National Commission of Women (NCW) has summoned the aide of Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal on 16 May over allegations of assault of AAP Rajya Sabha MP Swati Maliwal.

The hearing of Bhibhav Kumar is scheduled for 17 May at 11 am, according to the summon.In light of these accusations, the Commission issued a notice, emphasising that failure to comply could result in further actions as deemed necessary by them. *—PTI*

No exception in granting interim bail to Kejri: SC

Supreme Court said Thursday that it has not made any exception for Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal in granting him interim bail for campaigning in the Lok Sabha polls and "critical analysis of the judgment is welcome". On 10 May, Kejriwal was granted interim bail. *—PTI*

SANDESHKHALI WOMAN ALLEGES ABDUCTION BID

KOLKATA, 16 MAY

A woman on Thursday lodged a police complaint claiming that three people recently attempted to abduct her when she stepped outside her home at night in West Bengal's Sandeshkhali, where allegations of sexual abuse against TMC leaders have surfaced.

Sources alleged that the woman is actively involved in taking part in protests against the reported atrocities in the riverine area.

"A complaint was lodged at 2.30 am against three persons following which a case was filed. She has named two persons in the complaint. No arrests have been made so far," a police officer said.

In a purported video shared by BJP leader and lawyer Priyanka Tibrewal on social media, the woman was heard saying that she was gagged and dragged out of her house, but after her daughter shouted and locals gathered, the "abductors" dumped her near a pond.

The complainant claimed that pressure was exerted on her to tell a local court that alleged atrocities on women in the area were "false".

Meanwhile, state BJP President Sukanta Mazumdar told reporters that there has been continuous pressure and threats on protestors to withdraw complaints and the abduction attempt bid has revealed the handiwork of TMC to suppress the atrocities. A series of purported videos surfaced recently from Sandeshkhali in North 24 Parganas district.

In one clip, a BJP leader of Sandeshkhali was heard saying that the protests by women were "staged" at the behest of the leader of the opposition, Suvendu Adhikari. *—PTI*

POLITICAL CLASHES

2 BJP workers killed in Odisha, West Bengal

Odisha murder took place over putting up posters **PHOTO: SCREENGRAB**

BERHAMPUR, 16 MAY

A BJP worker was killed and seven others were injured in a clash between supporters of the ruling BJD and saffron party in Odisha's Ganjam district, police said on Thursday.

The incident took place in Sri Krushna Saranapur village in Khallikote police station area on Wednesday night over putting up posters for poll campaigning.

The deceased Dilip Kumar Pahana, 28, who was a resident of the village succumbed to injuries during treatment at MKCG Medical College and Hospital here, a police officer said. According to preliminary investigation, the clash occurred over putting up posters of a candidate and both sides used sharp weapons in the fight, he said, adding the injured persons are undergoing treatment at the state-run hospital and their condition is stated to be stable. Irate BJP workers allegedly vandalised several vehicles parked near the house of Khallikote assembly seat's BJD candidate and sitting MLA Suryamani Baidya and blocked the road near the police station. They also demanded the arrest of the MLA and her husband Daitary Behera. BJP president JP Nadda, who undertook a roadshow in Bhubaneswar, also expressed concerns over the clash and said such incidents should not happen.

Another BJP worker was found dead in WB

Another BJP worker was found dead in West Bengal's Purba Bardhaman district on Thursday, police said. BJP alleged that he was killed by the "goons" backed by the ruling TMC, a charge rejected by the state's ruling party. The body of Abhijit Roy, BJP's booth President in Jamna in Monteswar police station area, was found hanging near a farmhouse. He had been missing since Wednesday night, police said.

Roy had played a crucial role for the BJP when the area, which is a part of the Burdwan-Durgapur Lok Sabha seat, went to the polls on 13 May, party leaders said.

Monteswar witnessed violence even on the day of the polling with BJP candidate Dilip Ghosh being heckled by TMC workers. *—PTI*

39% candidates in 6th phase are crorepatis: ADR

NEW DELHI, 16 MAY

About 39 per cent of candidates contesting in the sixth phase of Lok Sabha polls are crorepatis with average assets of Rs 6.21 crore, according to poll rights body ADR.

Among the candidates contesting in the sixth phase on 25 May, the highest assets have been declared by BJP candidates from Kurukshetra Naveen Jindal at Rs 1,241 crore followed by Santrupt Misra at Rs 482 crore and Sushil Gupta at Rs 169 crore, the analysis by Association of Democratic Reforms said. Out of the 866 candidates contesting the Lok Sabha polls, 338 (39 per cent) are crorepatis and the average assets per candidate contesting in the Lok Sabha phase VI election is Rs 6.21 crore.

Among the major parties, all six candidates from BJD, four out of four candidates each from RJD and JD(U), 48 (94 per cent) out of 51 candidates from BJP, 11 (92 per cent) out of 12 candidates from SP, 20 (80 per cent) out of 25 candidates from Congress, 4 (80 per cent) out of 5 candidates from AAP and 7 (78 per cent) candidates out of 9 candidates from AITC have declared assets worth more than Rs 1 crore.

Among lowest asset declaration is Master Randhir Singh, an independent candidate from Rohtak, who declared Rs 2 worth of assets followed by Ram Kumar Yadav, a candidate from SUCI(C) in Pratapgarh, who declared assets worth Rs 1,686. declared serious criminal cases against themselves. About 180 (21 per cent) out of 866 candidates have declared criminal cases against them. *—PTI*

TMC, BJP FACEOFF

Didi's Nandigram defeat echoes in Tamluk

KOLKATA, 16 MAY

As the electoral battle intensifies in West Bengal's Tamluk constituency, a fierce confrontation between TMC and BJP looms large with TMC seeking retribution for Mamata Banerjee's loss in Nandigram and the saffron party striving to fortify its stronghold.

Former Calcutta High Court judge Abhijit Gangopadhyay, who joined BJP immediately after resigning from his post on 5 March and was fielded by the party from the crucial seat, and the selection of young Turks Debangshu Bhattacharya and Sayan Banerjee by TMC and CPI(M) respectively have intensified the political rivalry in the seat.

Nandigram, where the anti-land acquisition movement in 2007 against the then Left Front government was instrumental in TMC's rise to power in 2011 in Bengal, is in Tamluk.

The enmity between Mamata Banerjee and BJP leader Suvendu Adhikari, epitomised by the latter's victory in Nandigram in the 2021 Assembly polls by 1,956 votes, has fuelled the TMC's resolve to avenge their defeat.

An election petition by Banerjee is pending before the Calcutta High Court challenging the declaration of Adhikari's victory.

"We are seeing this election as an opportunity to avenge the Nandigram Assembly poll result," Saumen Mahapatra, TMC MLA from Tamluk Assembly segment, said.

He asserted that according to the results of the zilla parishad and municipal polls conducted subsequent to the 2021 Assembly elections, TMC maintains a lead of 77,000 votes over the BJP in the Tamluk Lok Sabha constituency and a margin of approximately 13,000 votes in Nandigram. Mahapatra claimed that compared to the former judge, Bhattacharya is a better candidate, having risen from student politics. Tamluk constituency, known to be part of the Adhikari family fortress in Purba Medinipur district, is almost evenly poised between BJP and TMC according to the 2021 Assembly election results. *—PTI*

Suvendu Adhikari; Mamata Banerjee

PHOTO: PTI

Jet Airways founder Naresh Goyal's wife dies

NEW DELHI, 16 MAY

Anita Goyal, wife of Jet Airways founder Naresh Goyal, died on Thursday at a private hospital in South Mumbai, sources said. She was 70. She had been undergoing treatment for cancer, the sources said. The wife of the Jet Airways founder, who is widely credited to have played a significant role in shaping up of the now grounded carrier, was undergoing treatment in a city hospital. Naresh Goyal, who has been granted a two-month interim bail in connection with a case of loan fraud, was said to be with his wife when she breathed her last. *—PTI*

UP boy drowns in Saryu River while taking selfies

BALLIA, 16 MAY

A 17-year-old boy drowned in the Saryu River here and another teenager is feared dead while they were taking selfies from their mobile phones, police said on Thursday. The incident occurred in the Maharajpur village on Wednesday evening. The victims were identified as Kaushal Ram, 17, and Jhunnu Ram, 16, Superintendent of Police Deo Ranjan Verma said. Kaushal and Jhunnu went into the deep waters of the Saryu River and were taking selfies on their mobile phones when they slipped and drowned, SP said. Upon receiving information, police rushed to the spot, SP Verma said. Kaushal's body was recovered on Thursday morning. Efforts were being made to look for Jhunnu. *—PTI*

Leopard found dead in Ch'garh; body parts missing

KORBA, 16 MAY

A male leopard was found dead in a forest in Korba district of Chhattisgarh with some of the body parts missing, officials said on Thursday. As per the preliminary autopsy, the wild animal was poisoned to death, they said. "The carcass of the leopard, aged around seven years, was found in Chaitma forest range under Katghora forest division on Wednesday," said Kumar Nishant, Divisional Forest Officer of Katghora. "One of the four claws, jaws and part of the leopard's skin were found missing, which triggered speculation of poaching. The chopped tail of the leopard was found nearby during a search of the area. The preliminary autopsy confirmed that the feline was poisoned to death," he said. *—PTI*

Kota: Toddler dies of suffocation after being locked in car

KOTA, 16 MAY

A three-year-old girl suffocated to death in a locked car while her parents were attending a wedding function here, police said on Thursday. According to police, the incident occurred on Wednesday evening. They identified the victim as Gorvika Nagar. Pradeep Nagar, the victim's father, had gone to attend a wedding function at Jorawarpura village with his wife and two daughters. As the family reached the venue, the mother and her elder daughter came out of the car and Pradeep went to park the vehicle, Khatoli police station SHO Banna Lal said. Presuming that Gorvika went inside the venue with her mother, Pradeep locked the car and went to attend the function. For about two hours, both parents engaged in different groups, the SHO said. When they met and asked each other about Gorvika, they realised she was with neither of them and began searching for her, he said. They found her unconscious in the back seat of the car The parents refused to conduct an autopsy. *—PTI*

Heatwave grips Northwest, mercury to hit 45°C in Delhi

IMD issues orange alert for Haryana, Punjab, R'than and Delhi

NEW DELHI, 16 MAY

Heatwave conditions are expected over northwest India during the next five days, with Punjab, Haryana, Rajasthan and Delhi predicted to bear the maximum impact, the India Meteorological Department (IMD) said on Thursday.

A fresh heatwave spell will also commence over east and central India from 18 May.

The Met office issued an orange alert for Haryana, Punjab, Rajasthan and Delhi, emphasising "high health concern" for vulnerable people, including infants, the elderly, and those with chronic diseases.

It warned of an increased likelihood of heat-related illnesses in people exposed to the sun for prolonged periods or engaging in heavy work.

"Severe heatwave conditions are very likely in some parts of west Rajasthan during 17-20 May and in Punjab, Haryana and Delhi during 18-20 May," the IMD said.

The mercury could soar to 45 degrees Celsius in New Delhi by Saturday.

A yellow alert has been issued for east Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Bihar, Gujarat, Jharkhand, Gangetic West Bengal and Odisha.

The Met office had earlier predicted a higher-than-normal number of heatwave days in the northern plains and central India in May.

Normally, the northern plains, central India and adjoining areas of peninsular India experience around three days of heatwaves in May.

April saw record-smashing maximum temperatures in east, northeast and southern peninsular India, prompting health warnings from government agencies and some states to suspend in-person classes in schools.

Several places recorded their highest-ever April day temperatures, with the mercury soaring to 47 degrees Celsius.

At least two people died in Kerala due to suspected heatstroke.

According to IMD data heatwave days in April were the highest in 15 years in Gangetic West Bengal and nine years in Odisha. Odisha also experienced the longest heatwave spell (16 days) in April since 2016. On Wednesday, a group of leading climate scientists said similar heatwaves could occur once every 30 years and they have already become about 45 times more likely due to climate change.

The World Weather Attribution (WWA) group emphasised that heatwaves intensified by climate change are making life much tougher for people living in poverty across Asia. *—PTI*

IMD has flagged 'health concern' for vulnerable people *PHOTO: PTI*

Meanwhile, rains lash TN & Kerala; IMD issues orange alert

T'PURAM/CHENNAI, 16 MAY

Rains in Kerala are likely to intensify in the next few days as the India Meteorological Department on Thursday issued an orange alert in several districts of the state from 18 May to 20 May. The India Meteorological Department (IMD) issued an orange alert for Palakkad and Malappuram for 18 May, Pathanamthitta, Alappuzha and Idukki for 19 May and in seven districts of the state for 20 May. In a respite from sweltering heat, Chennai and nearby districts on Thursday received light to moderate rainfall and several other regions of Tamil Nadu too witnessed showers. *—PTI*

Wreckage of the vehicles that were damaged after a 100-foot-tall illegal billboard fell on a petrol pump on Monday *PHOTO: PTI*

Hoarding crash toll rises to 16, couple found dead

MUMBAI, 16 MAY

The search and rescue operation at the Ghatkopar hoarding collapse site in Mumbai was called off on Thursday morning, an official of the National Disaster Response Force (NDRF) said.

The operation went on for 66 hours after a giant 120 feet x 120 feet hoarding collapsed on a petrol pump in the Chheda Nagar area during gusty winds on Monday evening, the official said.

It was called off at 10.30 am on Thursday, the NDRF official said, adding that BMC Commissioner Bhushan Gagrani made an announcement about it after inspecting the site.

Shortly after midnight on Wednesday, the bodies of a retired general manager of Air Traffic Control (ATC) and his wife were pulled out from a car stuck underneath the structure, taking the death toll to 16. The accident has also left 75 people injured.

The official said that five interconnected girders of the hoarding had to be cut one by one to rescue the bodies of the couple.

The civic chief said they have thoroughly checked the site to ensure that no more person is trapped there. Now, the work of clearing the debris will continue through the day, he said.

He said agencies like BMC, Mumbai police, BPCL, NDRF, Mumbai fire brigade, and Mahanagar Gas participated in the rescue operation and completed it "maintaining proper coordination".

Also, action is being taken on a "war footing" to remove illegal hoardings in the metropolis, he said.

Railway authorities should submit the structural stability reports of hoardings to BMC, even if they do not require the civic body's permission, Gagrani said. *—PTI*

FAKE 'BOMB' NOTE SPARKS PANIC ON VADODARA-BOUND FLIGHT

NEW DELHI, 16 MAY

Panic gripped a Delhi-Vadodara Air India flight at the IGI airport here after a crew member spotted a tissue paper with the word "bomb" written on it in the aircraft's washroom, police said on Thursday. The flight was searched after the note was discovered on Wednesday evening but nothing suspicious was found, a police officer said.

He said the aircraft was ready for take-off when the crew member spotted the tissue paper at 7 pm.

The Central Industrial Security Force and the Delhi Police were informed and passengers were asked to deboard the flight, he said.

The aircraft was checked thoroughly and nothing was found. The passengers were provided with a stay at a hotel near the airport, he said.

According to a statement from Air India, a specific security alert was detected on Air India flight AI819 scheduled to operate from Delhi to Vadodara, before departure.

"All passengers were safely deboarded, following the necessary protocol, and the aircraft was taken to a remote bay for mandatory checks by security agencies. Our colleagues on the ground ensured to minimise the inconvenience caused to our guests by this unexpected disruption," the statement said. *—PTI*

Indians shake hands with Myanmar nationals during a rally against scrapping of the Free Movement Regime at Indo-Myanmar Friendship Gate, in Champhai district of Mizoram, on Thursday *PHOTO: PTI*

Mizoram protests India-Myanmar border fencing

AIZAWL, 16 MAY

Thousands of people participated in rallies in Mizoram on Thursday to protest the Centre's decision to fence the India-Myanmar border and withdraw the free movement regime with the neighbouring country.

The peaceful rallies, organised by Zo Re-Unification Organisation (Zoro), were held in Zokhawthar and Vaphai villages in Champhai district bordering Myanmar, and many people from the neighbouring country also took part in the processions, a leader of the organisation said.

Zoro is a Mizo group which seeks the reunification of all Chin-Kuki-Mizo-Zomi tribes of India, Bangladesh and Myanmar by bringing them under one administration.

The rally in Vaphai began at 7 am and ended around 10 am while another procession in Zokhawthar, where the India-Myanmar Friendship Gate is located, commenced at 11 am and is underway, Zoro general secretary L Ramdinliana Renthlei said.

"Thousands of people took to the streets in Vaphai while around 7,000 protestors participated in the Zokhawthar rally. Hundreds of people from Myanmar took part in the two rallies, while several could not enter India as the authorities concerned had to close the Friendship Gate to prevent any untoward incident," he said.

Across the India-Myanmar Friendship Gate in Zokhawthar, people waved at each other and raised slogans against the Indian government's decision to scrap the free movement regime and fence the international border between the two countries.

Protesters also held placards and banners, demanding the continuation of free movement in border areas and asserted that they belong to the Zo ethnic group and have been living together for ages.

The free movement regime (FMR) allows people to cross up to 16 km on both sides of the international border.

Mizoram shares a 510-km-long border with Myanmar's Chin state and the Mizos share ethnic ties with people belonging to the Chin community. All government offices and schools in the two villages remained closed on Thursday, Renthlei said.

He claimed that such a protest was also held in Manipur's Tengnoupal district.

"Rallies are peaceful and there is no law and order issue so far," a senior police officer said.

The protesters demanded that the Centre must review its decision to fence the India-Myanmar border and scrap the FMR with the neighbouring country, Renthlei said.

More than 34,000 people from the Chin state of Myanmar are currently taking shelter in different parts of Mizoram, according to the state home department.

The Chin people fled their homes following a military coup in the neighbouring country in February 2021.

The Mizoram government, civil society organisations and student bodies have strongly opposed the Centre's decision to fence the India-Myanmar border and lift the FMR because they believe that it will "disturb" close contact between ethnic communities of the two countries. *—PTI*

Kerala widow's family protests outside airline office

T'PURAM, 16 MAY

Relatives of a woman, who was unable to see her husband one last time before his death in Oman due to the Air India Express cabin crew strike that resulted in cancellation of her flight, protested with the body of the deceased outside the Air India SATS (AISATS) office in the Kerala capital on Thursday.

The body of the man was brought to Kerala in the morning and the relatives went with it directly to the AISATS office here.

The relatives kept the body in front of the steps of the building housing the AISATS office and silently stood around it, according to visuals shown on TV channels. The woman's father alleged that he lost his son-in-law due to the airline's indifference.

He claimed that till now the airline has not even refunded the cancelled tickets amount.

The husband of the woman, Amrita, was hospitalised in Muscat in Oman due to heart problems and was in the ICU, leading to her decision to book tickets on an AI Express flight for 8 May.

However, she was in for a rude shock when they reached airports across the state when they were informed that all flights were cancelled. *—PTI*

Relatives of the woman who could not meet her husband before his death in Oman due to AI Express strike protest with his body outside Air India SATS office in Thiruvanathapuram *PHOTO: MATHRUBHUMI*

PAKISTAN TO INDIA

Hearing, speech impaired woman to appear for class 8 exams

INDORE, 16 MAY

Geeta, a hearing and speech impaired woman who returned to India from Pakistan in 2015, is all set to appear for her Class 8 examination to be conducted by the Madhya Pradesh State Open School Education Board, an official said.

The application of 33-year-old Geeta has been approved, allowing her to appear for the examination starting next week, the official of the board said on Thursday.

"While approving Geeta's application, we have allowed her to appear for Class 8 examination and she will get her admit card soon," Director of the State Open School Education Board Prabhat Raj Tiwari said.

The Class 8 examination conducted by the State Open School Education Board will begin on 21 May and conclude on 28 May, officials said.

Late Minister of External Affairs Minister Sushma Swaraj helped Geetha reunite with her family *PHOTO: AGENCIES*

Anand Service Society, an Indore-based NGO, has been helping Geeta to appear for the Class 8 exams, its secretary Gyanendra Purohit said.

Geeta's real name is Radha and she currently lives in Maharashtra's Chhatrapati Sambhajinagar district with her mother Meena Pandhare, he said.

After returning to India from Pakistan, Geeta stayed in Indore for nearly five years. She cleared Class 5 exam in 2020, but she could not go ahead with further studies due to the outbreak of COVID-19 pandemic and other reasons, Purohit said.

Citing his video call interaction with Geeta using gestures, he said that she wants to become financially independent by studying.

According to officials, Geeta's age is estimated to be 33 years. She had crossed over to Pakistan nearly 23 years ago after accidentally boarding a train as a child. She was found sitting alone on the Samjhauta Express at the Lahore railway station by Pakistan Rangers.

The deaf and mute girl was adopted by Bilquis Edhi of Pakistan's social organisation named Edhi Foundation and kept with her in Karachi. *—PTI*

1 killed in firing over land row in Kutch, 15 detained

GANDHIDHAM, 16 MAY

One person was killed and three others were injured when a group of men opened fire and attacked another group in an apparent bid to capture a piece of land inside the Little Rann of Kutch (LRK) in Gujarat, a police official said on Thursday.

In a video of the three-day-old incident that went viral on social media platforms on Thursday, the accused men can be seen charging towards the other group in their vehicles and then firing some rounds on them when challenged.

While the clash took place on 13 May evening inside LRK, an FIR was registered at the Samakhiyari police station on 14 May, said Sagar Bagmar, Superintendent of Police (Kutch-East).

"Four people were injured in the attack, including three from bullets. Of these, one Dinesh Koli suffered a bullet injury on his forehead and was rushed to a hospital in Rajkot, where he died on Wednesday evening. We have registered an FIR and detained 15 people so far," he said.

The FIR has been registered on a complaint submitted by Kanmer village resident Magan Gohil, who was also injured in the clash.

As per the FIR, when Gohil and 10 other residents of Kanmer and surrounding villages were at a place which was once a salt factory, 17 persons reached there on five vehicles and warned Gohil and others to vacate the site, saying it belongs to them.

While three people in the group that claimed ownership of the land were armed with guns, others were carrying sticks and sharp weapons, the FIR said, adding they were led by two men, Bharat Bharwad and Bharat Vaghela, both residents of Kanmer village.

The accused hurled abuses at Gohil and asked him to vacate the place. They also threatened to kill him if their orders were not followed.

While Gohil and two others who received bullet injuries were out of danger, Koli died while being treated at a hospital in Rajkot, police said. *—PTI*

90 hospitalised in M'rashtra due to food poisoning

MUMBAI, 16 MAY

In a suspected food poisoning case, at least 90 people were admitted to different hospitals after consuming eatables during a temple feast in Maharashtra's Nanded district, police said on Thursday.

The incident occurred on Wednesday evening at Naigaon, an official said.

"A feast was organised and food was served to devotees just outside a Shiva temple. They were given 'ambil' (porridge) and 'khir' (a sweet dish made from milk) to eat," he said. But after having 'ambil', the devotees felt dizzy and started vomiting, he said.

"Initially, some of them were rushed to a hospital. But towards late evening, there were more complaints of food poisoning. Till late night, a total of 90 people were admitted to various hospitals for treatment," he said. The condition of all of them is stable and they are out of danger, the official added.

A police team visited the spot and an inquiry is being conducted, he said. *—PTI*

TAKING A CHILL PILL

An orangutan takes rest under a utensil to protect itself from the scorching sun at Assam State Zoo, as mercury soars over 34°C in Guwahati
PHOTO: PTI

It can set the country on fire—AI and India's polls

In November last year, Muralikrishnan Chinnadurai was watching a livestream of a Tamil-language event in the UK when he noticed something odd.

A woman introduced as Duwaraka, daughter of Velupillai Prabhakaran, the Tamil Tiger militant chief, was giving a speech.

The problem was that Duwaraka had died more than a decade earlier, in an airstrike in 2009 during the closing days of the Sri Lankan civil war. The then-23-year-old's body was never found.

And now, here she was - seemingly a middle-aged woman - exhorting Tamilians across the world to take forward the political struggle for their freedom.

Chinnadurai, a fact-checker in Tamil Nadu, watched the video closely, noticed glitches in the video and soon pinned it down to being a figure generated by artificial intelligence (AI).

The potential problems were immediately clear to Chinnadurai: "This is an emotive issue in the state [Tamil Nadu] and with elections around the corner, the misinformation could quickly spread."

As India goes to the polls, it is impossible to avoid the wealth of AI-generated content being created - from campaign videos, to personalised audio messages in a range of Indian languages, and even automated calls made to voters in a candidate's voice.

Content creators like Shahid Sheikh have even had fun using AI tools to show politicians in avatars we haven't seen them in before: wearing athleisure, playing music and dancing.

But as the tools get more sophisticated, experts worry about its implications when it comes to making fake news appear real.

"Rumours have always been a part of electioneering. [But] in the age of social media, it can spread like wildfire," says SY Qureshi, the country's former chief election commissioner.

These images of Rahul Gandhi, Arvind Kejriwal and Mamata Banerjee were created using AI tools
PHOTO: SAHIXD

"It can actually set the country on fire."

India's parties are not the first in the world to take advantage of recent developments in AI. Just over the border in Pakistan, it allowed jailed politician Imran Khan to address a rally.

And in India itself, Prime Minister Narendra Modi has also already made the best of the emerging technology to campaign effectively - addressing an audience in Hindi which, by using the government-created AI tool Bhashini, was then translated into Tamil in real time.

But it can also be used to manipulate words and messages. Last month, two viral videos showed Bollywood stars Ranveer Singh and Aamir Khan campaigning for Congress. Both filed police complaints saying these were deepfakes, made without their consent. Then, on 29 April, Modi raised concerns about AI being used to distort speeches by senior leaders of the ruling party, including him.

The next day, police arrested two people, one each from AAP and Congress, in a doctored video of Home Minister Amit Shah. BJP has also faced similar accusations from opposition leaders in the country.

The problem is - despite the arrests - there is no comprehensive regulation in place, according to experts, which means "if you're caught doing something wrong, then there might be a slap on your wrist at best", according to Srinivas Kodali, a data and security researcher.

In the absence of regulation, creators told BBC they have to rely on personal ethics to decide the kind of work they choose to do or not do.

BBC learned that, among the requests from politicians, were pornographic imagery and morphing of videos and audios of their rivals to damage their reputation. "I was once asked to make an original look like a deepfake because the original video, if shared widely, would make the politician look bad," reveals Divyendra Singh Jadoun. "So his team wanted me to create a deepfake that they could pass off as the original." Jadoun, founder of The Indian Deepfaker (TID), which created tools to help people use open source AI software to create campaign material for Indian politicians, insists on putting disclaimers on anything he makes so it is clear it is not real. But it is still hard to control.

Sheikh, who works with a marketing agency in the eastern state of West Bengal, has seen his work shared without permission or credit by politicians or political pages on social media.

"One politician used an image I created of Modi without context and without mentioning it was created using AI," he says.

And it is now so easy to create a deepfake that anyone can do it.

"What used to take us seven or eight days to create can now be done in three minutes," Mr Jadoun explains. "You just need to have a computer."

Indeed, the BBC got a first-hand look at just how easy it is to create a fake phone call between two people - in this case, me and former US president Donald Trump.

Despite the risks, India had initially said it wasn't considering a law for AI. This March, however, it sprung into action after a furore over Google's Gemini chatbot response to a query asking: "Is Modi a fascist?" Rajeev Chandrasekhar, Information Technology Minister, said it had violated the country's IT laws.

Since then, the government has asked tech companies to get its explicit permission before publicly launching "unreliable" or "under-tested" generative AI models or tools. It has also warned against responses by these tools that "threaten the integrity of the electoral process".

But it isn't enough: fact-checkers say keeping up with debunking such content is an uphill task, particularly during the elections when misinformation hits a peak.

"Information travels at the speed of 100km per hour," says Chinnadurai, who runs a media watchdog in Tamil Nadu. "The debunked information we disseminate will go at 20km per hour." And these fakes are even making their way into the mainstream media, says Kodali. Despite this, the "election commission is publicly silent on AI".

—BBC News

SALAR ساہر

Auroras causing solar storms are a menace for technology

At the weekend, millions of people around the world were treated to a mesmerising display of the aurora borealis and aurora australis, better known as the northern and southern lights. The lights, usually seen in crown-like regions surrounding the Earth's poles, were pushed to mid-latitudes by heightened activity from the Sun.

The same geomagnetic storms causing the auroras can cause havoc with our planet's human-made infrastructure. These storms, caused by high energy particles from the Sun hitting our atmosphere, have the potential to knock out electrical grids and satellites. So what were the impacts of this recent burst of stormy space weather? Around 8 May, an active region of the Sun exploded, flinging a billion-tonne cloud of magnetised and electrically charged material known as a coronal mass ejection (CME) towards the Earth. This turned out to be the first of several successive CMEs, which later merged to form a single, massive structure.

This crashed into our planet's magnetosphere, the region of space near Earth that is dominated by the terrestrial magnetic field. As sub-atomic particles from the CME are funnelled downward, channels of electrical current flowing through part of the atmosphere known as the ionosphere, are intensified.

Apart from triggering the auroral displays, this can cause powerful magnetic fluctuations at the Earth's surface. As a result, electrical currents can flow through power grids, pipelines and railway lines, potentially interfering with normal operations.

The sub-atomic particles from the CME can cause damage to the solar panels and electronics of satellites. On Saturday, Elon Musk said that his company SpaceX's Starlink internet satellites were "under a lot of pressure," because of the storm, "but holding up so far".

The disturbances in the ionosphere were compounded by a series of bright eruptions called "flares" on the Sun that poured high energy radiation across the Earth's sunlit face. Flare activity is associated with radio blackouts that can interfere with high-frequency radio communications, such as those required by aircraft on trans-oceanic flights. There are indications that the storm caused some disruption on transatlantic flights, but these reports are still being assessed. Shawn Dahl, service coordinator for the Space Weather Prediction Center at the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) in Colorado, told US National Public Radio that power grid operators had been busy "working to keep proper, regulated current flowing without disruption".

He also added that some GPS systems had struggled to lock locations and had offered incorrect positions. These GPS problems appear to have caused disruption to navigational systems in farming equipment in the US. Many tractors use GPS to plant precise rows in a field, avoid gaps and overlaps. The problems happened during the height of planting season in the midwest and Canada. Some of this may sound a bit like a Hollywood disaster movie. Yet, while the GPS problems caused significant disruption in agriculture, impacts do not appear to have been widespread across the Earth. For many or most, life seems to have carried on, regardless. How come? Awareness and preparedness certainly helped. What we just experienced was, without question, an unusually strong space weather event. It's early days and scientists will be analysing the storm of May, 2024 for years to come. However, early indications are that last weekend's geomagnetic storm was the most powerful since the "Halloween storm" of October, 2003. Beyond the beautiful lights in the sky, the negative impacts of the 2024 storm aren't yet completely clear. At this stage, it doesn't look like there were any catastrophic failures, but infrastructure operators will be taking stock to understand if, and how, their systems were affected. Behind the scenes, national agencies such as NOAA and the Met Office in the UK were monitoring the activity, issuing forecasts and alerts to interested parties, and liaising with experts and governments. In response, infrastructure operators took steps to ensure the continuity of services and safeguard their equipment. However, what we've just experienced wasn't the biggest such event ever seen. That honour goes to the "Carrington Event" of September, 1859, in which a massive CME (or most likely a pair of CMEs) triggered a huge geomagnetic storm that pushed the aurora borealis as far south as the Caribbean, and induced such powerful currents in copper telegraph lines that at least one operator suffered a severe electric shock – though he lived. By some metrics, the Carrington event was two to three times more powerful than the storm we have just witnessed. Such massive events are rare, probably occurring once every couple of hundred years, in contrast to the May 2024 storm which was of a scale seen once every couple of decades.

—PTI

The storm caused auroral activity in locations where it doesn't often take place
PHOTO: EPA

LETTERS write to us at salar@salar.news

Biden & his flip flop on providing and cutting off arms to Israel

One day, President Joe Biden is pausing bomb shipments to Israel. Another day, he's approving other arms deals. He's threatening to cut off more shipments if Israel invades Rafah — but only those that are offensive in nature.

As tensions between the US and Israel have risen over Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's conduct of the war in Gaza, Biden's recent moves can be hard to follow.

Biden has tried to strike a difficult balance between staunch support of America's closest ally in the Middle East while condemning Israel's heaving bombing of civilians in Gaza. That tension spiked last week when the US paused a shipment of heavy bombs to Israel, and then Biden threatened to withhold additional offensive aid if Israel launches a major operation in the southern Gaza city where more than a million people are sheltering.

Yet other American weapons continue to move through the approval process unabated. That includes a potential $1 billion tranche containing tank ammunition, tactical vehicles and mortar rounds that the administration reported to Congress on Tuesday. Biden also made clear the US will continue to provide defensive weapons, including interceptors for its Iron Dome air defence system.

Legally, the US can't cut Israel off completely. Since 2008, the US has had to weigh all arms sales to Israel and other countries in the region against the requirement that Israel maintains a "qualitative military edge" against all enemies, both state and non-state actors.

Here's what you need to know to read between the lines of what the US is saying about the weapons it's providing Israel, and what it's really doing as the war in Gaza enters its eighth month:

What's paused

The Biden administration in late April decided to pause a shipment of 3,500 "dumb" — aka, unguided — munitions that officials expected Israel to use in Rafah: 1,800 of those were 2,000-pound bombs and 1,700 of those were 500-pound bombs. US officials were particularly concerned about the 2,000-pound bombs and the impact the massive weapon would have in a dense urban setting.

In announcing the pause, Biden for the first time acknowledged that civilians had been killed by these weapons in Gaza.

"Civilians have been killed in Gaza as a consequence of those bombs and other ways in which they go after population centers," Biden said on CNN, referring to 2,000-pound bomb. "I've made it clear to Bibi and the war cabinet: They're not going to get our support, if in fact they go on these population centers." The bombs were approved by Congress in 2021. They had been licensed by the administration, manufactured, and ready to be shipped when the order came down to pause the movement. But that's not the whole story. Those munitions are typically attached to a guidance kit, which converts them into "smart" weapons that are guided precisely to their targets. For the 2,000-pound bombs, that's the Joint Direct Attack Munition; for the 500-pound bombs, that's the Small Diameter Bomb.

A senior US official stressed that there are no tail kits in the shipment that's on hold. The official, and others interviewed for this story, were granted anonymity to speak about sensitive conversations.

US President Joe Biden's support to Benjamin Netanyahu's Israel changed course after the latter attacked Rafah. Meanwhile, the death toll in Gaza reached 35,091, including 15,103 children. Here is a picture of Inas Abu Maamar, 36, embracing the body of her five-year-old niece Saly, who was killed in an Israeli strike on 17 October, 2023. The picture won the World Press Photo of the Year award
PHOTO: AP & MOHAMMED SALEM/REUTER

What's under review?

Separately, the official said that the State Department is reviewing multiple other direct commercial sales — those between US industry and a foreign partner, which require an administration-approved export license — including JDAM tail kits. None of these sales involves "imminent" transfers, the official said. In other words, none would be used in the immediate Rafah operation.

The JDAMs case that's under review involves 6,500 kits. It came up for license in December 2023, and the administration has been sitting on it ever since, according to a congressional aide and a US official. There are other potential foreign military sales to Israel that are moving through the State Department's approval process. Those sales are between the US government and a foreign government and typically involve a more complex and lengthy process. It's not unusual for the administration to take its time approving these types of weapons, which include engines for the F-35 fighter jet, tank rounds, mortar rounds and medium tactical vehicles. Once approved by the administration and Congress, these weapons will likely take months or even years before they are produced and delivered.

What's still flowing?

The US has been Israel's main supplier of advanced weaponry for decades. Under a 2016 agreement, each year the US provides Israel $3.8 billion in military aid. That includes $3.3 billion in foreign military financing — the process by which the US provides Israel funding to buy American-made weapons — and $500 million for joint US-Israel missile defense programs. This decade-long guarantee of funding has allowed the Israeli and US governments to plan well ahead on arms and equipment sales, meaning that there are multiple discussions happening throughout the government at any given time. None of these sales is for immediate shipment. The discussions are around contracts and deliveries years in advance. As of October, the US had 599 "active" cases of foreign military sales for Israel, meaning ones that have been approved by the administration and notified to Congress. Altogether, the active cases for Israel are valued at $23.8 billion, according to the State Department. Since 7 October , the Biden administration has reportedly approved more than 100 such sales to Israel, most of which were not required to be notified to Congress because they did not meet a certain dollar threshold.

—Courtesy, Politico

PHOTO: AP

Car slams into wall in Croatia; 4 migrants die

ZAGREB, 16 MAY

A car carrying migrants on Thursday skidded off road and hit a wall in southern Croatia, killing four people and injuring several others, police said. Croatian media reported that the driver was trying to escape police to avoid being caught for people smuggling. The five other passengers, including a child, were injured and taken to the hospital. Croatia is a European Union member state. Migrants trying to reach Western Europe come to Croatia through Bosnia before moving on towards Slovenia or Italy. They often turn to people smugglers to get them across borders without authorization. The accident happened around 7 am in the town of Sinj, 18.6 kilometers away from the Bosnian border. *—AP*

42 rescued, 3 still missing after boat sends signal

ATHENS, 16 MAY

Forty-two people have been rescued while another three are missing after a boat believed to have been carrying migrants sent out a distress call while sailing in the Mediterranean south of the Greek island of Crete, the Greek coast guard said Thursday. Officials said they were alerted by the Italian coast guard overnight about a boat in distress 50 kilometres south of Crete. Greece's coast guard said 40 people were rescued by ships that had been sailing in the area, while another two people were later rescued by a Greek navy helicopter. The coast guard said survivors have told them that there are three others still missing, and that officials are conducting search and rescue operations in the area. It was not immediately clear what kind of vessel the passengers had been on, or why the boat sent out a distress call. *—AP*

Venezuela's barred Oppn member now surrogate aspirant

SABANA DE MENDOZA, 16 MAY

At an intersection packed in four directions, rallygoers scream and light up cellphones in the evening as Venezuelan opposition figure María Corina Machado climbs onto a flatbed truck like a presidential candidate. She has been barred from the July 28 election. Still, she crisscrosses the country, shaking hands, taking selfies, blowing kisses and promising the defeat of President Nicolás Maduro — all as a surrogate for a quiet former diplomat who has not yet begun to campaign.

"María Corina! María Corina!" the people yell, sometimes in unison, in the small Andean foothill town of Sabana de Mendoza. "I don't remember what his name is," seamstress Danis Cegarra, 48, said. *—AP*

Musk set to launch satellite Internet in Indonesia

BALI, 16 MAY

SpaceX founder Elon Musk will be in Indonesia for the launch of the company's Starlink internet satellite service in the country on May 19, state media reported citing a senior minister. The American tech billionaire will join Indonesian President Joko Widodo to launch the broadband services of the aerospace company's satellite network at the World Water Forum (WWF) in Bali, the country's Maritime Affairs and Investment Coordinating Minister Luhut Binsar Pandjaitan said on Wednesday, according to Antara news agency. "The President, together with Elon Musk, will launch Starlink in the hopes of facilitating communication in remote areas. The launch will take place on Sunday," the minister was cited as saying. *—ANI*

Xi, Putin push for 'solution' to Ukraine

Xi hails 75th anniversary of China-Russia ties

BEIJING, 16 MAY

China's President Xi Jinping and his Russian counterpart Vladimir Putin on Thursday signed and issued a joint statement on deepening China-Russia comprehensive strategic partnership. Putin said Russia and China wanted a political solution to the "Ukraine crisis" while Xi called for a two-state solution to the war in Gaza.

The partnership of coordination for a new era on the occasion of the 75th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic ties between the two countries state media Xinhua reported.

Xi rolled out the red carpet for Putin, who arrived in Beijing for a two-day state visit, signalling the deepening alignment between the two nations amidst Russia's ongoing advances in Ukraine, CNN reported.

The grand reception, complete with a military band serenade and multiple gun salute outside the Great Hall of the People, underscored the significance of the leaders' close relationship amid escalating tensions with the West.

In their discussions, Thursday morning, Xi said China-Russia relations have "stood the test of a changing international landscape" and should be "cherished and nourished" by both sides, according to a readout from China's Foreign Ministry.

"China is ready to work with Russia to stay each other's good neighbour, a good friend and good partner that trust each other, continue to consolidate the lasting friendship between the two peoples, and jointly pursue respective national development and revitalisation and uphold fairness and justice in the world," Xi said. This is his first overseas trip since beginning his new presidential term. *—ANI*

Russian President Vladimir Putin and Chinese President Xi Jinping attend a signing ceremony in Beijing, China PHOTO: PTI

CHINA, CAMBODIA BEGIN 15-DAY DRILLING EXERCISES

SVAY CHOK, 16 MAY

Cambodia and China began 15-day military exercises on Thursday as questions grow about Beijing's increasing influence in the Southeast Asian nation.

About 1,315 Cambodian military personnel and 760 Chinese are participating in the regular "Golden Dragon" ground and sea manoeuvres, including three Chinese and 11 Cambodian ships.

As the first stage of the exercises got underway at a Cambodian military base with a forested and mountainous training area about 90 kilometres northwest of Phnom Penh, Cambodian army commander in chief Gen Vong Pisen thanked China for providing new equipment. The United States and others have worried that China's involvement in building a new pier at the Ream base. Cambodia has insisted, however, that its constitution prohibits the deployment of foreign military forces on its territory, and the Defence Ministry said the two Chinese corvettes were just "testing" the pier and were on hand to participate in the Golden Dragon exercises, whose second phase will include maritime manoeuvres near the Ream base. *—AP*

Kamala flags few Indian Americans in politics

WASHINGTON, 16 MAY

The number of Indian Americans in elected offices is not reflective of their growing population, US Vice President Kamala Harris has said, as she urged the members of the minority ethnic community to run in the elections increasingly. Harris, 59, who is of both Indian and African heritage, was on Wednesday speaking at "Desis Decide" -- the annual summit of Indian American Impact, a democratic party think tank that supports and funds Indian Americans running for elected offices across the country.

"Over the years, we've had so much more participation by Indian Americans in the electoral process running for office. But the numbers are still not reflective of the size of the growing population," Harris said. *—AP*

Rescue workers wheel Slovak Prime Minister Robert Fico, who was shot and injured, to a hospital in the town of Banska Bystrica, central Slovakia PHOTO: AP/PTI

Slovak PM seriously injured but 'stable'

PRAGUE, 15 MAY

Slovak Prime Minister Robert Fico is in a stable but serious condition after being shot several times on Wednesday, according to doctors.

The hospital director said he was currently in an intensive care unit after five hours in surgery. Earlier Fico, 59, was said to have been fighting for his life after being gravely injured in an attack in the small town of Handlova. A suspect was detained at the scene of the shooting.

Miriam Lapunikova, director of the FD Roosevelt University Hospital in Banska Bystrica, where Fico was admitted, told a press conference that his condition "is truly very serious". Previously, Deputy Prime Minister Tomas Taraba told BBC that Fico's surgery had gone "well" and "I guess that at the end he will survive".

Interior Minister Matus Sutaj Estoka described it as a politically motivated assassination attempt. Fico is a divisive figure at home - and controversial in the EU - for his calls to end military aid to Ukraine and sanctions on Russia.

But condemnation of the shooting has come from far and wide and it has been described as an attack on democracy.

Gunman fired at close range

The gunman was in a small crowd of Fico supporters who were gathered outside a cultural centre in Handlova, where the prime minister had been holding a meeting.

The shooting took Fico's security officers completely by surprise. Footage shows the prime minister after he was shot being carried by several officers, who bundle him into a car and drive him away from the scene.

Later on Wednesday, Taraba told BBC's Newshour programme that Fico was "not in [a] life-threatening situation at this moment". He added the prime minister was shot "from very close" and that "one bullet went through the stomach and the second one hit the joint".

The shooting came on the day parliament began discussing the government's proposal to abolish Slovakia's public broadcaster RTVS. Thousands of Slovaks have protested against the proposed reform of the public broadcaster in recent weeks. However, a planned opposition-led demonstration was called off on Wednesday as news of the shooting emerged.

In his interview with BBC, Deputy Prime Minister Taraba blamed "false narratives" by opposition parties in Slovakia for the shooting. "Our prime minister several times mentioned in the past that he was afraid that this would happen," Taraba said.

—BBC News

- Miriam Lapunikova, director of the FD Roosevelt University Hospital in Banska Bystrica, where Fico was admitted, told a press conference that his condition "is truly very serious". Previously, Deputy Prime Minister Tomas Taraba told BBC

IN DUESSELDORF

A burnt car stands in front of a residential building where firefighters inspect the damages after a fire raged, in Duesseldorf, Germany. Several people died. According to the fire department, a kiosk integrated into a residential building caught fire on Thursday night for reasons as yet unexplained PHOTO: PTI

60 rockets launched at Israeli bases: Hezbollah

BEIRUT, 16 MAY

Lebanon's Iran-backed Hezbollah group said it launched on Thursday "more than 60" rockets at Israeli military positions in retaliation for overnight air strikes on the country's east. The Israel Defence Forces also confirmed it, as fighter jets responded by striking targets belonging to the terror group in northeastern Lebanon.

In the attack on Wednesday, Hezbollah claimed to have launched explosive-laden drones at an Israeli Air Force base from which a giant missile-detecting blimp, known as Sky Dew, is operated. The base is located near Golani Junction, some 35 kilometres from the Lebanon border.

The strikes were "in response to the Israeli enemy's attacks last night on the Bekaa region" in eastern Lebanon's Baalbek area, the group added

According to IDF two drones were launched in the attack, with one being downed by air defenses, according to the military. The second explosive drone damage was being assessed by the military. It marked Hezbollah's deepest strike in Israel amid the war.

Hezbollah has launched thousands of drones, missiles, and rockets at northern Israel in the past seven months, though the attacks have largely been limited to the border area. Until Wednesday, the terror group had fired projectiles at Israeli targets up to around 15 kilometres from the frontier. *—Times of Israel*

The base is located 35 kilometres from Lebanon border PHOTO: WIKIPEDIA

Gaza war: Five Israeli soldiers killed in Jabalia

GAZA CITY, 16 MAY

Five Israeli soldiers have been killed in Gaza, the military says, in one of the deadliest incidents of its kind since the war began in October.

Israeli media say the troops were killed when they were mistakenly hit by Israeli tank fire on Wednesday. It happened in Jabalia in northern Gaza, where Israeli forces are battling Hamas fighters. Troops went back into the town this week after previously pulling out, saying Hamas had regrouped there.

Tens of thousands of civilians have fled Jabalia since Saturday, when the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) launched an operation with air strikes. Troops re-entered Jabalia on Monday. Fighting there and in the southern town of Rafah, where about half of Gaza's civilian 2.3 million population had taken shelter, has intensified in recent days.

Some 6,00,000 Palestinians have since fled Rafah, and another 1,00,000 have been newly displaced by a resurgence of fighting in the north, the UN says. *—AP*

4 KILLED

Hundreds of French cops deployed amid New Caledonia riots

PARIS, 16 MAY

Armed forces were protecting New Caledonia's two airports and port and hundreds of French police were on their way to the Pacific territory after a third night of violent riots that have killed four people.

In three municipalities of the French collectively, gendarmes faced about 5,000 rioters, including between 3,000 and 4,000 in the capital, Noumea, said France's high commissioner, Louis Le Franc. By Thursday, 200 people had been arrested, and 64 gendarmes and police injured, while road barricades put up by the protesters were causing a "dire situation" for medicine and food for the population, Le Franc added.

France declared a state of emergency in New Caledonia starting at 5am on Wednesday, giving authorities additional powers to ban gatherings and forbid people from moving around the island. Police reinforcements added 500 officers to the 1,800 usually present on the island after rioters torched vehicles and businesses and looted stores. Noumea resident Yoan Fleurot said he had seen looting and destruction of properties. Some store owners let their shelves be raided, pleading that their shops not be destroyed, he said.

The roadblocks were difficult to pass through, and he had been subjected to insults and threats of violence, he said. "I am New Caledonian, but I no longer know my country any more," he said. "Caledonia will have a hard time recovering from this crisis … Everything, 80%, is destroyed." Main and secondary roads in Noumea were blocked by barricades with burning cars and their shells – some with booby traps of gas bottles and ignition systems, Le Franc said.

—The Guardian

Gendarmes faced about 5,000 rioters PHOTO: X/@GUARDIANNEWS

IMRAN APPEARS BEFORE PAK COURT BY VIDEOLINK

ISLAMABAD, 16 MAY

Pakistan's jailed former prime minister Imran Khan has made a virtual appearance before the Supreme Court through a videolink from prison in connection with a case regarding amendments to the country's anticorruption law.

Thursday's hearing was the first time Khan, imprisoned since August 2023 in several cases, made an appearance before the top court. However, the court appearance of the 71-year-old leader was not livestreamed on the top court's website or aired on the country's news channels.

Al Jazeera reached out to Information Minister Attaullah Tarar for his comments on why the hearing was not broadcast on news channels or the Supreme Court website, but did not receive any response. Khan's Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf Party (PTI) accused Chief Justice Qazi Faez Isa of collusion with the government for not allowing the hearing from being broadcast to the people. *—Al Jazeera*

FAMINE AND VIOLENCE CONTINUE

UN warns of continued fighting in Sudan

UNITED NATIONS, 16 MAY

The Sudanese people "are trapped in an inferno of brutal violence" with famine, disease and fighting closing in and no end in sight, the top UN humanitarian official in the war-ravaged country said on Wednesday.

Clementine Nkweta-Salami told a UN press conference that "horrific atrocities are being committed with reckless abandon, reports of rape, torture and ethnically motivated violence are streaming in", communities and families have been torn apart, and almost 9 million people have been forced to flee their homes in what is now the world's largest displacement crisis.

Earlier this month, the UN food agency warned Sudan's warring parties that there is a serious risk of widespread starvation and death in Darfur and elsewhere in Sudan if they don't allow humanitarian aid into the vast western region – a view echoed Wednesday by Nkweta-Salami.

Sudan plunged into conflict in mid-April 2023, when long-simmering tensions between its military led by Gen. Abdel Fattah Burhan, and the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces commanded by Mohammed Hamdan Dagalo, broke out into street battles in the capital, Khartoum. Fighting has spread to other parts of the country, especially urban areas and the vast western Darfur region, and the UN says over 14,000 people have been killed and 33,000 injured.

The paramilitary forces, known as the RSF, have gained control of most of Darfur and are besieging the key city of El Fasher, the capital of North Darfur and the only capital they don't hold. *—PTI*

Sudan plunged into conflict in mid-April 2023 PHOTO: X/@JPNWMN

Meta faces fresh scrutiny under EU's new digital rules

LONDON, 16 MAY

The European Union opened fresh investigations Thursday into Facebook and Instagram over suspicions that they're failing to protect children online, in violation of the bloc's strict digital regulations for social media platforms. It's the latest round of scrutiny for parent company Meta Platforms under the 27-nation EU's Digital Services Act, a sweeping set of regulations that took effect last year with the goal of cleaning up online platforms and protecting internet users. The European Commission, the bloc's executive arm, said it's concerned that the algorithmic systems used by Facebook and Instagram to recommend content like videos and posts could "exploit the weaknesses and inexperience" of children and stimulate "addictive behaviour". It's worried that these systems could reinforce the so-called "rabbit hole" effect that leads users to increasingly disturbing content. *—PTI*

Rupee settles 4P lower at 83.50 against US dollar

MUMBAI, 16 MAY

The rupee stayed range-bound and settled 4 paise lower at 83.50 (provisional) against the US dollar on Thursday, weighed down by unabated foreign fund outflows amid investors' weak appetite for riskier assets. However, a firm trend in domestic equities supported the local unit and restricted its losses, forex traders said. The rupee remains under pressure due to ongoing elections and foreign fund outflows, and the same shall subside once the results are out, they added. At the interbank foreign exchange market, the local unit traded in a narrow range. It opened at 83.45 and touched an intraday high of 83.44 and a low of 83.50. The domestic unit finally settled for the day at 83.50 (provisional), down 4 paise from its previous close. On Wednesday, the rupee had settled at 83.46 against the US dollar. Meanwhile, the dollar index was trading at 104.40, higher by 0.06 per cent. *—PTI*

Oberoi Realty rallies 7%, hits 52-week high

MUMBAI, 16 MAY

Real estate developer Oberoi Realty's shares soared up to 7.1 per cent, hitting its 52-week high at Rs 1,629.15 a piece on the BSE in Wednesday's intraday deals. The stock has moved up 7.94 per cent in the last one month, while it has zoomed 9.39 per cent year to date. The recent surge in stock price, however, came after the real estate firm reported strong quarterly earnings in January-March quarter of financial year 2023-24 (Q4FY24). The Mumbai based developer reported a 64 per cent year-on-year increase in net profit, reaching Rs 788 crore. Total income for the same period surged by 56 per cent to Rs 1,558 crore. For the full financial year 2023-24, Oberoi Realty reported a rise in net profit to Rs 1,925 crore compared to Rs 1,904 crore in the previous fiscal year. Similarly, total income for FY24 increased to Rs 4,818 crore from Rs 4,293 crore in FY23. *—PTI*

Ferry between Nagapattinam & Lanka halted

COLOMBO, 16 MAY

The resumption of the passenger ferry service between Nagapattinam in India and the Kankesanthurai region near Jaffna in the Northern Province of Sri Lanka has been delayed again for an indefinite period, Aviation Minister Nimal Siripala de Silva said. The passenger ferry service between Nagapattinam in Tamil Nadu and Kankesanthurai (KKS) suburb of Jaffna, which was to resume on 13 May, was delayed due to a "technical shortcoming", de Silva said. The service, launched in October last year after nearly 40 years, was halted a few days later owing to rough weather. *—PTI*

Markets spurt 1% on buying in HDFC Bank

Sensex climbed 676.69 points to settle at 73,663.72

MUMBAI, 16 MAY

Equity benchmark indices Sensex and Nifty shot up nearly 1 per cent on Thursday, driven by buying in HDFC Bank and Infosys and a rally in the US and Asian markets.

In a highly volatile trade, the 30-share BSE Sensex climbed 676.69 points or 0.93 per cent to settle at 73,663.72. During the day, it hit a high of 73,749.47 and a low of 72,529.97.

The NSE Nifty surged 203.30 points or 0.92 per cent to 22,403.85.

"The domestic market experienced a late surge, driven by strong global trends that pointed to lower-than-expected US consumer inflation figures, which suggests at least two interest rate cuts in 2024," Geojit Financial Services Head of Research Vinod Nair said.

Among the Sensex components, Mahindra & Mahindra, Bharti Airtel, Tech Mahindra, Titan, Infosys, JSW Steel, Bajaj Finserv, HDFC Bank, Larsen & Toubro and Kotak Mahindra Bank were the major gainers.

Among the Sensex components, Mahindra & Mahindra, Bharti Airtel, Tech Mahindra and JSW Steel were the major gainers **PHOTO: PTI**

Maruti, State Bank of India, Power Grid, Tata Motors and IndusInd Bank were the laggards.

In Asian markets, Seoul, Tokyo, Shanghai and Hong Kong settled with gains. European markets were trading lower. Wall Street ended higher on Wednesday.

Global oil benchmark Brent crude declined 0.33 per cent to USD 82.45 a barrel. Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs) offloaded equities worth Rs 2,832.83 crore on Wednesday, according to exchange data.

Halting its three-day rally, the 30-share BSE Sensex declined 117.58 points or 0.16 per cent to settle at 72,987.03 on Wednesday. The NSE Nifty dipped 17.30 points or 0.08 per cent to 22,200.55. *—PTI*

100% STAKE DEAL

Adani Energy acquires Essar's Mahan-Sipat for Rs 1,900 cr

MUMBAI, 16 MAY

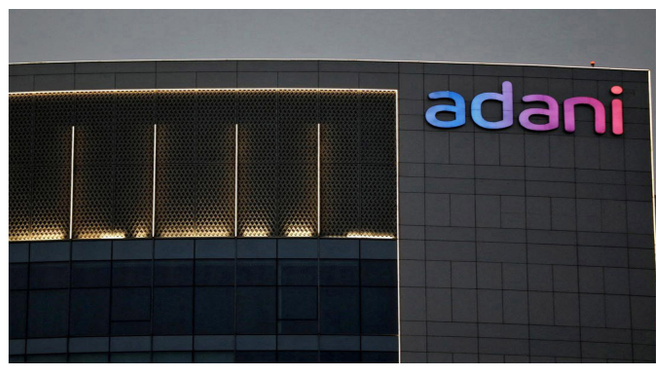
Adani Energy Solutions on Thursday said it has completed the acquisition of Essar's Mahan-Sipat Transmission assets for an enterprise value of Rs 1,900 crore.

The share acquisition is pursuant to definitive agreements signed in June 2022, a company statement said.

According to the statement, Adani Energy Solutions Ltd (AESL), has acquired a 100 per cent stake in Essar Transco Limited after obtaining the requisite regulatory and other approvals for an enterprise value of Rs 1,900 crores. The acquisition covers a fully-operational 400 kV, 673 ckt kms (circuit kilometre) inter-state transmission line linking Mahan in Madhya Pradesh to the Sipat pooling substation in Chhattisgarh.

The project operates under the Central Electricity Regulatory Commission (CERC) regulated return framework and was commissioned on 22 September, 2018.

Adani Transmission Step Two Ltd, a wholly-owned subsidiary of Adani Energy Solutions has acquired 100 per cent stake in Essar Transco Ltd for Rs 1,900 crore.



The acquisition will consolidate AESL's presence in central India with 4 operating assets having 3,373 ckt km in the region **PHOTO: PTI**

This establishes a new benchmark for AESL to raise capital and unlocks the lower-cost debt for its operational assets. MUFG Bank Ltd is the sole lender for the financing.

The acquisition of the Mahan-Sipat transmission network will consolidate AESL's presence in central India with 4 operating assets having 3,373 ckt km in the region.

The acquisition is consistent with the company's philosophy of augmenting its existing capacities and bringing in efficiency through operational synergies and creating network effect, it said in the release.

"Along with a robust energy demand, the ability to recognize and tap market opportunities within the areas of interest continues to propel and position AESL at the forefront of energy transition in India," it added. *—PTI*

Silver hits all-time high at ₹1,800; gold jumps ₹650

NEW DELHI, 16 MAY

Silver soared by Rs 1,800 to hit a fresh record high of Rs 88,000 per kg on Thursday, while gold prices jumped Rs 650 to Rs 74,050 per 10 grams in line with strong global trends.

According to HDFC Securities, rising for the second straight session, silver prices surged Rs 1,800 to hit its lifetime high of Rs 88,700 per kg in Delhi. It had closed at Rs 86,900 per kg in the previous session.

Meanwhile, the precious metal price jumped from Rs 650 to Rs 74,050 per 10 grams. In the previous session, it had closed at Rs 73,400 per 10 grams.

In the international markets, spot gold at Comex was trading at USD 2,386 per ounce, up by USD 21 from the previous close.

PHOTO: PTI

Silver was also quoted higher at USD 29.55 per ounce. In the previous session, it had settled at USD 28.80 per ounce.

The swift rise in silver prices is primarily due to its unique industrial properties, which set it apart from gold. Key industrial metals like copper, aluminium, zinc, and lead prices have risen sharply since April on worries over supply threat. *—PTI*

FROM RS 8,400

Govt slashes windfall tax on domestic crude to ₹5.7K/tonne

NEW DELHI, 16 MAY

The government has slashed windfall tax on domestically produced crude oil to Rs 5,700 per tonne, from Rs 8,400 per tonne, with effect from Thursday.

The tax is levied in the form of Special Additional Excise Duty (SAED).

The SAED on the export of diesel, petrol and jet fuel or ATF, has been retained at 'nil'.

The new rates are effective from 16 May, an official notification said.

India first imposed windfall profit taxes on 1 July, 2022, joining a host of nations that tax supernormal profits of energy companies.

The new rates are effective from 16 May **PHOTO:PTI**

The tax rates are reviewed every fortnight based on average oil prices in the previous two weeks. *—PTI*

Mahindra profit rises 4% to ₹2,754 cr

NEW DELHI, 16 MAY

Mahindra & Mahindra on Thursday reported a 4 per cent increase in consolidated profit after tax (PAT) to Rs 2,754 crore for the March quarter, driven by strong performance of its automotive and farm sector segments.

The company had posted a consolidated PAT of Rs 2,637 crore in the January-March quarter of the 2022-23 fiscal, M&M said in a regulatory filing.

Revenue increased to Rs 35,452 crore in the fourth quarter, registering a growth of 9 per cent, as compared to Rs 32,456 crore in the corresponding period a year ago, it added.

For the year full year ended March 31, the company posted a consolidated net profit of Rs 11,269 crore as against Rs 9,025 crore in FY23, an increase of 25 per cent.

Revenue rose 15 per cent to Rs 1,39,078 crore in the last fiscal as compared with Rs 1,21,362 crore in FY23.

"It has been an excellent year with most of our businesses delivering a high level of performance. Auto continued its high growth trajectory, Farm gained share in a tough market and Mahindra Finance delivered on asset quality," M&M Managing Director & CEO Anish Shah said.

Revenue increased to Rs 35,452 crore in the fourth quarter **PHOTO: PTI**

- Mahindra & Mahindra on Thursday reported a 4 per cent increase in consolidated profit after tax (PAT) to Rs 2,754 crore for the March quarter, driven by strong performance of its automotive and farm sector segments.

TechM was a weak spot, the turnaround has commenced with the new organisation in place, he added.

The company said its board has approved a dividend of Rs 21.10 per share of the face value of Rs 5 each.

Shares of the company were trading flat at Rs 2,302.80 apiece on the BSE. *—PTI*

L&T arm opens new production unit in Saudi

NEW DELHI, 16 MAY

Larsen & Toubro on Thursday said its wholly-owned arm L&T Valves Ltd has set up a new manufacturing unit in Saudi Arabia.

The facility is strategically located at Al Jubail, off the Dammam-Abu Hadriyah Highway. L&T Valves is one of the largest suppliers of on-off valves to Saudi Arabia, the company said in a statement. "The new facility will significantly enhance our local production capabilities in line with the Saudi Vision 2030. It will further strengthen the collaboration between L&T and Saudi Arabia," said Anil V Parab, Whole-time Director and Senior Executive Vice President. *—PTI*

India's exports may rise 12-15% to cross $500B

NEW DELHI, 16 MAY

The country's merchandise exports are expected to increase about USD 60-70 billion to USD 500 billion by the end of FY25, apex exporters' body FIEO said on Thursday.

In 2023-24, exports dipped over 3 per cent to USD 437 billion.

Federation of Indian Export Organisations (FIEO) President Ashwini Kumar also said the country's services exports are also likely to reach USD 390-400 billion this fiscal. "We are looking for merchandise exports between USD 500-510 billion in 2024-25. In the services, we expect exports to be around USD 390-400 billion for the current fiscal," Kumar said. *—PTI*

RELIANCE COMPLETES SALE OF REC SOLAR NORWAY FOR $22M

MUMBAI, 16 MAY

Reliance Industries Ltd on Thursday said it has completed the sale of REC Solar Norway AS to Oslo-listed Elkem ASA for around $22 million. Reliance Industries is a wholly-owned unit of REC Solar Holdings and is involved in the manufacturing of kerf-based polysilicon in the Scandinavian country.

In October 2021, a unit of Reliance acquired Norway's solar panel manufacturer at an enterprise value of $771 million as the Indian oil-to-retail conglomerate sought to extend its dominance into alternative energy.

In January this year, Reliance stated that REC Solar Holdings AS, a step-own wholly-owned subsidiary, on January 14, 2024, entered into a share purchase agreement with Elkem ASA for the sale of its 100 per cent equity stake in REC Solar Norway AS for an aggregate cash consideration of $22 million.

Founded in 1904, Elkem ASA is a silicon-based material provider, and listed on the Oslo Stock Exchange. Reliance will continue to retain the technology and intellectual property rights pertaining to kerf-based polysilicon, the firm had stated in January. REC Norway had a turnover of Norwegian krone 1.1 billion in the calendar year 2022 and a net worth of Norwegian krone 0.3 billion as of 31 December, 2022, contributing about 0.08 per cent and 0.03 per cent, respectively, of Reliance' annual consolidated turnover and net worth for the financial year 2022-23, it had said. *—PTI*

PHOTO: PTI

ICRA REPORT

'Air passenger traffic in India to touch 418 M'

NEW DELHI, 16 MAY

Air passenger traffic in the country is projected to touch record levels in the range of 407-418 million in the current financial year and the revenues of select airport operators together are estimated to rise 15-17 per cent during the same period, rating agency Icra said on Thursday.

Surpassing the pre-Covid level by 10 per cent, the traffic reached 376.4 million in the fiscal ended March 2024.

In a report, Icra said the overall traffic is expected to see a healthy growth of around 8-11 per cent year-on-year to around 407-418 million in FY2025, supported by strong pick-up in both leisure and business travel, improving connectivity to newer destinations in the domestic segment and the continued uptick in international travel.

Indian airport operators' revenue is anticipated to grow 15-17 per cent on an annual basis in the current fiscal ending March 2025, it added.

Indian airport operators' revenue is anticipated to grow 15-17 per cent on an annual basis **PHOTO: PTI**

Icra's sample set of airport operators include Airports Authority of India (AAI) as well as operators of Delhi, Hyderabad and Cochin international airports.

"The recovery in the Indian airport passenger traffic is one of the best compared to other major global counterparts. India accounted for 4.2 per cent of the global passenger traffic in CY2023, and its share in passenger traffic has improved from 3.8 per cent in CY2019.

"While the global passenger traffic recovered to just 96 per cent of global passenger traffic in CY2023, the Indian airport passenger traffic revived to 106 per cent of the pre-Covid level owing to strong economic growth as well as the addition of new airport routes. The Indian air passenger traffic is expected to outperform the global trend,", Vinay Kumar G, Vice President & Sector Head, Corporate Ratings at Icra, said.

- Air passenger traffic in the country is projected to touch record levels in the range of 407-418 million in the current financial year and the revenues of select airport operators together are estimated to rise 15-17 per cent during the same period, rating agency Icra said on Thursday.

According to the rating agency, airport operators, regulator and other stakeholders have made significant progress in resolving the long-pending issues -- cost of equity, return on security deposits, forex losses, and treatment of real estate income. *—PTI*

SBI's FD rate on short-term maturity raised to 75 bps

NEW DELHI, 16 MAY

The country's biggest lender State Bank of India (SBI) has hiked fixed deposit rate on select short-term maturity up to 75 basis points, a move likely to be followed by other lenders.

For term deposits of 46-179 days, the rate has been increased by 75 basis points to 5.50 per cent, as against the earlier 4.75 per cent, as per the revised figure posted on SBI website.

There has been a 25 basis point increase in the other two maturity buckets -- 180-210 days and 211 days to less than 1 year, to 6 per cent and 6.25 per cent respectively.

The new rates on deposit less than Rs 2 crore are effective from May 15, 2024.

Senior citizens would be eligible for additional 50 basis points on the revised rates as per the norms, it said.

SBI has left interest rates unchanged on other maturity buckets beyond one year.

For fixed deposits above Rs 2 crore, the bank has increased interest rate on both short-term and long-term maturity.

For three maturity periods starting from 7 days till 210 days, the interest rate has been raised between 10 basis points and 25 basis points.

At the same time, longer duration term deposits starting one year till three years, will attract higher interest rates between 20 basis points and 25 basis points. *—PTI*

PHOTO: PTI

- The country's biggest lender State Bank of India (SBI) has hiked fixed deposit rate on select short-term maturity

Sunil Chhetri: The backbencher who will finish on top of the list

He will play his last match against Kuwait in FIFA WC qualification match

NEW DELHI, 16 MAY

Football was not very close to Sunil Chhetri's heart during his days as a bubbly teenager with proclivity for pranks. He was only looking to use the sport as a vehicle to gain entry to a reputed college and continue his education.

Coming from a family with a background in football, Sunil was not aware that he was destined for greater things in the beautiful game, but his army-man father Kharga Chhetri had an inkling. Sunil's career started to take shape in the national capital as he represented City Club Delhi from 2001-02.

Then came the big break as Indian club football heavyweights Mohun Bagan, enamoured by his skills with the ball, signed him in 2002. He stayed at the city's famed Maidan till 2005 and scored eight goals in 18 matches for Mohun Bagan, paving the way for his entry into the Indian U-20 side and then to the senior national team.

What boosted Kharga's belief was that Sunil, with his skills, was excelling in football for every school he played. Born in Secunderabad, Andhra Pradesh on 3 August, 1984, football ran in Sunil's family as his father represented the Indian Army and his mother, Sushila, played for the Nepal's national team along with her twin sisters.

While he remained a prankster and a "backbencher" even after cementing his place in the Indian team, things changed for Sunil when he was handed the captain's armband by then head coach Bob Houghton after Bhaichung Bhutia's retirement from international football following the Asian Cup in 2011.

His role was not restricted to finding the back of the net anymore. Despite increasing expectations and the pressure to deliver every time he took to the field, Sunil performed his job with aplomb, often without enough support from his colleagues in top international tournaments such as the Asian Cup, AFC Challenge Cup, the World Cup Qualifiers and the friendlies.

"Myself, Steven (Dias) and (NP) Pradeep made fun of the senior players, that was me. Everything was a prank and I was mischievous," he said. Sunil had turned vegan on the advice of his good friend, Virat Kohli, whose sport enjoys unprecedented popularity in this part of the world.

—PTI

Sunil Chhetri announced on Thursday, announced that he will retire from international football after the FIFA World Cup qualification match against Kuwait on 6 June

PHOTO: X/@AIFF

CHHETRI'S UNPARALLELED CAREER

- 2002- Chhetri began his career at Mohun Bagan
- 2004- Scored 6 goals during Santosh trophy
- 2005- Signed for JCT (Jagatjit Cotton & Textile Football Club)
- 2008- Led India to win AFC Challenge Cup and qualified for AFC Asian Cup for 1st time in 27 years
- 2010- He was the first Indian to play in MLS and third Indian to play outside of South Asia. He also played for Wizards against Manchester United
- 2011- Received Arjuna Award
- 2013- Joined Bengaluru FC (BFC) and plays opening game against Mohun Bagan
- 2018- Won Indian Super Cup with BFC
- 2019- Received Padma Shri Award
- 2020-21- Was top scorer for BFC for 3 seasons. Scored 100th goal for BFC in ISL final
- 2021- Received Khel Ratna Award
- 2024 - Announced his retirement from Indian national team after their FIFA World Cup qualification match against Kuwait on 6 June

ITALIAN OPEN

Zverev dominates baseline points, wins the match

ROME, 16 MAY

In a heavy-hitting quarter-final clash, World No. 5 Alexander Zverev overcame early trouble to outlast Taylor Fritz, stepping closer to claiming his first title of the season at the Italian Open.

Zverev defeated the American 6-4, 6-3, thanks to his strong serve and flawless baseline play in a one-hour and 30-minute match."That's the shot I either win or lose matches with. That's how it's been my entire career.

When I'm hitting that shot well, that's when I win. When I'm not hitting it too well, that's when I lose. That's the shot I've been working the most on in my career, also my serve obviously," Zverev said in his on-court interview as quoted by ATP.The German took a dramatic tumble in the third game of the match, tumbling on his stomach while recovering to the middle of the court after hitting a backhand return.

Zverev began bleeding from both hands and saw the physiotherapist.Despite the fall, Zverev gained a break that game (he tripped when leading 0/30) and never looked back, gaining a one-set lead. The 27-year-old displayed no physical problems for the remainder of the one-hour, 30-minute encounter.

Zverev was nearly faultless behind his serve, facing no break points all night and remaining unbeaten in this tournament. Zverev, who is now 26-9 on the season, had a solid match against Fritz, converting 11 of his 17 net points, according to ATP Stats.

Paul dominates Hurkacz and advances to the semi-finals

The American Tommy Paul, seeded No. 14, won two sets to one (7-5, 3-6, 6-3) against the Pole Hubert Hurkacz, seeded No. 7 and reached the semi-finals. finals of the Rome tournament, Thursday midday, at the Foro Italico in Roma.Paul, the 16th ATP player in the world, will face the winner of the upcoming match between Greek Stefanos Tsitsipas, seeded No. 6, and Chilean Nicolas Jarry, seeded No. 21 in the semi-finals of the tournament Italian.Before his success against Hurkacz, 9th in the ATP world, on Thursday, the American tennis player had eliminated the Russian Aslan Karatsev (6-4, 6-2), the German Dominik Koepfer (6-4, 6-3), and Russian Daniil Medvedev, seeded No. 2 (6-1, 6-4).The Pole won against the Spaniard Rafael Nadal (6-1, 6-3), against the Argentinian Tomas Martin Etcheverry, seeded n°25 (7-6 [7], 6-2), and against the Argentinian Sebastian Baez, seeded n°17 (5-7, 7-6, 6-4).

—AP

PHOTO: ALEXZVEREV123

PHOTO: @TENNISCHANNEL

PHOTO: PTI

Dhoni will carry on for two more years: Hussey

BENGALURU, 16 MAY

Chennai Super Kings batting coach Michael Hussey is hoping that charismatic Mahendra Singh Dhoni would continue with the team for a couple of years more, saying the former skipper was still batting well.The 42-year-old Dhoni surprised everyone by stepping aside as captain of the team just a day before the start of the 2024 season. Ruturaj Gaikwad was handed the reins of the side."We are hoping he does keep going. He is still batting so well. He does prepare well - he gets into the camp very early and hits a lot of balls. He has been in good touch all season really," Hussey said on ESPN's Around the Wicket show."I guess we just got to try to manage him from the body side of things.*—PTI*

Hasaranga joins Shakib as world's top T20 all-rounder

DUBAI, 16 MAY

Hardik Pandya remains the top-ranked Indian in the ICC ranking list for T20 all-rounders at number seven while Sri Lankan spinner Wanindu Hasaranga has joined Bangladesh's Shakib al Hasan at the top of the pile. With 185 points, Pandya is placed seventh behind Australia's Marcus Stoinis. Hasaranga moved up a place to be joint leader with Shakib with 228 points. They were followed by Afghanistan's Mohammad Nabi (218) and Zimbabwe's Sikander Raza (210), who also gained two places.*—A*

Man United 3-2 win over Newcastle

LONDON, 16 MAY

Newcastle United's chances of qualifying for any European competition took a significant hit following their 3-2 defeat at Old Trafford against Manchester United on Wednesday.

With this loss, Newcastle's fate is now out of their hands, making their upcoming match against Brentford critical but still, probably, not enough to clinch a European-bound finish in the Premier League.

Kobbie Mainoo opened the scoring for Manchester United in the 31st minute, taking advantage of a lapse in Newcastle's defense. Newcastle responded in the second half, equalizing through Anthony Gordon. However, Manchester United regained the lead when Amad Diallo scored his first goal for the club in the 57th minute. Rasmus Højlund, coming on as a substitute, extended the lead to 3-1 with his first touch. Lewis Hall scored a late goal for Newcastle in stoppage time, but it wasn't enough to salvage a point; the final score was 3-2.

The defeat leaves Newcastle level on points with Manchester United but ahead on goal difference. Chelsea's win against Brighton, however, pushes Newcastle down to seventh place. Chelsea only need a draw against Bournemouth to secure sixth place.

—AP

Manchester United celebrates scoring his team's second goal

PHOTO: X/@MANUTD

MI, LSG LOOK TO END DISMAL IPL CAMPAIGNS WITH WIN

MUMBAI, 16 MAY

Out of reckoning from the IPL playoffs, Mumbai Indians and Lucknow Super Giants will look to end their campaign on a winning note when they clash at the Wankhede Stadium here on Friday.

While Mumbai Indians were knocked out of the playoffs race long ago, Lucknow Super Giant's chances of making the last four are extremely bleak even if they win their last IPL game here by a huge margin.

Three consecutive defeats have not only denied LSG crucial points, they have also battered their net run rate.

The seventh-placed LSG's NRR of -0.787 will not improve significantly for them to get back into contention, as Royal Challengers Bengaluru, at No. 6, is much better placed with an NRR of 0.387.

Five-time IPL champions Mumbai Indians were the first team to be knocked out of the race for the playoffs this year as they endured a horror first season under new skipper Hardik Pandya. With only four wins from 13 matches so far, Mumbai Indians can at best finish with 10 points if they win on Friday, something that can help them avoid a last-place finish.

—PTI

TODAY'S MATCH

LUCKNOW SUPER GIANTS vs 2024 MUMBAI INDIANS (INDIAN PREMIER LEAGUE)

Time: 7:30 PM

Where To Watch:

Jio Cinema, Star Sports Network

Stadium: Wankhede Stadium, Mumbai

PSG ends slump with a 2-1 win at Nice. Marseille loses 1-0 to Reims

PARIS, 16 MAY

Paris Saint-Germain snapped a four-game winless run by beating Nice 2-1 in the French league on Wednesday. PSG had lost its past three matches including back-to-back 1-0 defeats to Borussia Dortmund in the Champions League semifinals and needed a stoppage-time goal to draw at home with lowly Le Havre. Record 12-time French champion PSG was missing star striker Kylian Mbappé as he nursed a sore hamstring sustained in Sunday's 3-1 defeat at home to Toulouse. It made little difference in Nice as PSG was 2-0 up midway through the first half with goals from winger Bradley Barcola and 18-year-old defender Yoram Zague. Forward Mohamed-Ali Cho pulled a goal back for Nice in the 32nd. Although Zague was given a tough time by tricky Nice winger Jérémie Boga in the second half, PSG's defense held firm. Nice defender Melvin Bard was shown a straight red card in the 75th for body-checking Barcola near the halfway line as he sprinted clear.

—AP

PHOTO: @PSG_ENGLISH

T20 IS PERFECT FORM

Cricket is in my blood: Usain Bolt

NEW DELHI, 16 MAY

Usain Bolt knows all about life in the fast lane and it wasn't a surprise when he picked T20 as his favorite form of cricket, a sport that's in his "blood" thanks to a passionate follower in his father.

Bolt, one of the greatest athletes of all time with eight Olympic gold medals to his credit, wanted to become a fast bowler growing up in Jamaica and now as the ambassador for next month's ICC T20 World Cup, he is finally getting to live a cricket dream.

"I grew up on cricket. My dad was a massive cricket fan and still is. It is something that I have always in my blood. It is wonderful to be a part of cricket again as an ambassador. I never got to live my dream of being a cricketer so to be ambassador of T20 World Cup is wonderful," Bolt told PTI in a telephonic interview from New York on Wednesday night.

Usain Bolt is the brand ambassador of the upcoming ICC T20 World Cup 2024

PHOTO: X/@USAIN BOLT

The world record holder in the marquee 100m and 200m called time on his unmatched career in 2017 and seven years on, his charisma too remains unmatched. One could sense a child-like excitement in him while talking about cricket as he headed towards the makeshift cricket stadium in New York, one of three T20 World Cup venues in the American mainland and host to the India-Pakistan clash on June 9.

He has spent the last few months traveling the world for music and football, and therefore, he has not had time to watch live cricket on TV, including the ongoing IPL.

"I have not been able to watch as much as I would like to but when I get time I try to catch up on T20s," said the 'Lightning Bolt'.

Speed continues to excite Bolt the most and no wonder he calls T20 the best format of the game. "T20s for sure... When they started it was a great idea and still is. It compresses the game because you have to be strong and quick but also be strategic, set a field, and get things done quickly. It combines a Test match and one day to create the perfect game."

—AP

- Usain Bolt knows all about life in the fast lane and it wasn't a surprise when he picked T20 as his favorite form of cricket, a sport that's in his "blood" thanks to a passionate follower in his father